

A WORLD OF BONES

BOOK ONE – THE PURE HEART

BY

JAMES C. BURKE

Wilmington, N.C.: James C. Burke,
2015

A WORLD OF BONES
Book One – The Pure Heart

Copyright 2015 by James C. Burke

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the expressed written permission of the publisher except for the brief quotations in a book review.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the authors' imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

For Information contact:

James C. Burke
1630 Forty-First Street
Wilmington, N.C. 28403
jamescburke@live.com

Contents

PROLOGUE	1
CHAPTER ONE	5
CHAPTER TWO	35
CHAPTER THREE	61
CHAPTER FOUR	93
CHAPTER FIVE	117
CHAPTER SIX	147
CHAPTER SEVEN	179
CHAPTER NINE	243
EPILOGUE	255

For my Friends

PROLOGUE

Quinley Hogg College was established on a one-hundred-acre tract of land on the northeastern boundary of Gilridge in 1878. The campus buildings were situated on a narrow street that continued where Mulberry Avenue ended. Most of the land that the college owned beyond a picturesque grove surrounding an artificial lake was put under cultivation. Students with an agricultural background and a desire for extra spending money oversaw the management of this operation. Almost always, the greater portion of the produce ended up in the college dining hall. The remainder was sold in the town market. The college buildings were three-story neoclassical structures, none differing from the other, made of deep red brick that gave the lot the appearance of a factory. The library was different. It was built in the Richardsonian Romanesque style from granite, and resembled a fortress. The dormitory for the ladies was on the south side of campus near the chancellor's house, and the gentlemen's dormitory was placed atop a hill on the north side. The marshaling yards of the railroad were located several blocks away, so it was far from being a tranquil retreat from modernity. The final element of the architectural scheme of the college was a fifty-foot stone clock tower with its nonfunctional carillon. Once it worked, but an attempt to replace its stiff mechanical action with a pneumatic key system proved faulty after its installation in 1909. The board of trustees saw little value in restoring it since the clock kept time accurately.

A faculty member, Dr. William Powell, having enjoyed its beautiful strains in his youth, set about restoring it with the blessing of the trustees, as long as he did so at his own expense. The only person on the faculty that helped him was Professor Lawson; not only because her love of music impelled her to the labor, but she enjoyed the company of the soft spoken, sentimental gentleman who always had something pleasant to say. Even when the results of his efforts proved disappointing, smiling and giving an almost inaudible chuckle, he said, "Let's try something else." That was, in

theory and practice, Julia's credo. Rather than crumble when her aspirations toppled, she set off on a new path that always required the utmost exertions, but ended with meager rewards. Still, she gave her all until a new path appeared before her.

Professor Lawson taught history, but she was a polymath. Her education commenced with the study of music. Midway through her career as a concert organist, she returned to college for a degree in mathematics. This was not her final degree. After teaching grade school for a few years, Lawson switched careers once more. This time, she earned a Master's Degree in History. Quinley Hogg College employed her as a lecturer to teach freshmen history courses. She was thirty-seven years old, well-liked by the students and her colleagues, and generally a person of modest means. For several years, Lawson had been trying to unravel a local mystery. It concerned an event that occurred in the early history of the town, a period that was poorly documented. Gilridge was not incorporated at the time. It did not have a church, town council, or even a constable. It was merely a trading post for planters of the region. The founders, a wealthy mariner from New England and two merchants from Charleston, secured a royal land grant for establishing a town on the site of an earlier failed settlement. After laying out their project town into lots, they sold them as a side venture while continuing their lucrative professions from a distance. By 1740, the town had sixty inhabitants, including twelve slaves, and a motley collection of crude log structures. The tavern owner – an agent for the founders – petitioned the colonial governor to have the town chartered. Within two years, the town was not only incorporated; it was the seat of the precinct – later the county. The civic institutions of town life followed rapidly from this point. The event in question happened earlier. In 1738, three families, consisting of fourteen individuals, arrived from Charleston. All disappeared without a trace from the colonial records. An extensive search of tax rolls, church records, newspaper notices, cemetery records, militia rolls, the first federal census, yielded no information on the fourteen or their descendants. Professor Lawson was about to give up her project. That is, until her research assistant Clara volunteered to help.

Shortly after noon, on September 12, 1918, Miss Clara Armistead left her parents' home on Mulberry Avenue for her last walk to Quinley Hogg College. A graduate student in history, she was the assistant to Julia Lawson. While at the state archives doing research for Lawson, she accidentally found a colonial era letter misfiled in a box of correspondences of early nineteenth century governors. Knowing that its contents definitely would excite Professor Lawson since her research focused on that period, she made a transcription. The letter was written by the daughter of the royal governor. Clara happened upon it while working on her thesis. The letter contained a short phrase that caught her attention, "Pox at Gilrigees towne." Spelling aside, she could easily see that the writer was referring to smallpox. The letter was dated March 24, 1738; two weeks after the fourteen set sail from Charleston. Could all of them have died of the disease? If they were sick when they arrived, the inspector of ships at the mouth of the river would have prevented the vessel from continuing. Then again, the coasters made the trip from Charleston in a few days. Regardless, Clara had something, and she was eager to share it with Professor Lawson. Also, Clara was anxious to tell the chairman of her department, Dr. Edward White, about a decision she had made that would affect her academic career. Nevertheless, she was confident that the change in the direction of her life was for the greater good.

Thursday, a week later, the healthy twenty-three-year-old student – admired and well-liked by all who knew her – would be lying in repose at Mr. Guthrie's Funeral Parlor. Symptoms of the illness appeared on Sunday. Feeling feverish midway through church, she took to her bed after dinner and died before first light Tuesday. She was the second victim of influenza in the tight-knit college town of Gilridge. The first, another young woman who worked in the office of the Central Railroad Company, was Emma Gales. The two did not know each other, nor did it seem that their paths crossed any time before they contracted the disease. The town health officer, Dr. Bates, assumed that they were infected by a mutual acquaintance, or mutual stranger, or some combination that

misfortune abundantly affords. Nevertheless, all their promise vanished. In the weeks that followed, the wave would wash over Gilridge full force, scouring away the promises drawn in the sand. The bright and vigorous fell in droves – tragically, the majority were young ladies since many of the men had gone to war. Then the flight and all was silent. The college closed in October; and then, in late November, feebly stumbled trying to regain stride in a lost semester. What Clara had found through her research during the last splendid days of her final September would be lost in the deluge.

CHAPTER ONE

Mulberry Avenue was shaded by a canopy of ancient oaks for the three blocks that led from town to the college. Many professors who taught there lived on the block, including old Dr. Dalton Polk, the former chancellor, and Dr. William Powell, the chair of Natural Sciences. Both had known Clara since she was a child, regarding her intellectually gifted and personable in a most considerate way. She listened carefully, and her expression revealed genuine interest. Closer to the college, at the end of the tree-lined avenue, was the house where Professor Julia Lawson boarded. Clara was her assistant.

When Clara passed through the gateway into the college, the bells of the carillon issued forth an ear shattering discord that reverberated across campus, bringing all activity to a standstill as if the fabric of time and space ripped apart with the sounding of the *tuba mirum*. Every bell in the compass of three octaves rang when their strikers were activated simultaneously. This was the first time in eight years a sound was heard from the bells. It awakened angrily! Within an instant, students and their professors were gawking out their windows to witness Professor Lawson stumble from the narrow arch midway up the tower onto the balcony. With hands over her ears, she fell on one knee. Thereafter, Dr. Powell and the three students helping him, staggered out of the doorway at the base of the tower. Holding their ears and shaking their heads, they tripped over each other like comics in the picture show. The onlookers could not contain their laughter. Soon the chancellor of the college arrived to scold the maestro and his quartet of engineers, but refrained when he observed their condition.

“Surely,” he said, “they’re not going to try that again!” After the crowd had enjoyed a good laugh, Clara approached Dr. Powell and asked if she might speak with Professor Lawson. He could not hear her, but waved her on to the doorway.

The inside of the tower was dank, poorly lit, and had a peculiar musty smell. The stairs projected from the walls rather than being supported from below. A rusty iron railing was embedded into the masonry steps that ascended the shadowy heights. All that climbed them felt like they were pulling themselves out of a pit rather than making their way to a stunning vista. Regardless, Clara did not like the step arrangement one bit. They were narrow; the rise of each was higher than normal; and the mortar was loose in places where the masonry held the railing making it shaky. Afraid of tumbling down with the slightest misstep, her heart raced when she reached the point when the railing wiggled in her grasp. The tread of each step was perpetually damp, so they had to be negotiated cautiously. This time her excitement over the discovery in the archives made her slightly courageous, so her ascent took half the time. On reaching the balcony, Clara found her mentor in complete disarray. Her dark hair worked loose from its tight bun; the frame of her spectacles was crooked to one side, and the other side of her face was streaked with grease. The professor's white blouse was thoroughly soiled. Clara, shocked by her appearance, asked,

"Professor, are you alright?" To which she replied,

"I suppose I'm fine, if that is what you are asking. There is a loud ringing in my ears, and I am not saying that in jest, Miss Armistead. Nevertheless, it appears that Dr. Powell has solved the pressure problem. I'm sure he is pleased with himself."

Clara took a handkerchief from her sleeve, gave it to Professor Lawson, and motioned to the side of her face that was marred by grime. Lawson laughed, and wiped her face.

"I'm certainly making a fine impression. Oh, I think I've ruined your handkerchief!"

"Don't worry – keep it. I have plenty. Now, I must show you something! Professor Lawson, can you hear me?" At that moment, Dr. Powell came bounding onto the balcony with his assistants.

"Julia, are you hurt?"

“What did you do, Dr. Powell?”

“Do?”

“Yes, do! And don’t call me Julia in front of students! They will think we were being familiar, and I do not want talk circulating about campus, sir! Now, what did you do to cause that – I don’t know if there are words to describe it? Can you hear me?” Puzzled, and surely mishearing, Dr. Powell asked,

“What makes you think I’m being familiar with you? Did I say something out of place?” Clara turned and said,

“Gentlemen, please; let’s take Professor Lawson inside, and let her rest for a moment. Allow her to regain her composure and tidy up before you celebrate your success.” Dr. Powell smiled, and excused himself. Clara was unsure how much of it he understood. He and the fellows were in the closed confines of the stone tower when the bells rang. Spying a group of students giggling below in the courtyard, she took Professor Lawson’s sleeve and guided her through the arch. Inside, she sat her down on a short stool that the gentlemen had carried up for some purpose that was not readily apparent; and then took a sheet of paper from her portfolio and said,

“I think I have hit upon something. Allow me to reset your hair while you read it.”

The professor took the transcribed letter from her, and read it by the light streaming in through the arch. For the most part, Lawson recovered from the ill-effects of the unexpected tintinnabulation. Upon reading the letter, she exclaimed,

“Pox! I suppose she meant smallpox, not syphilis... the letter is dated around the time legend has it the settlers disappeared. Where did you find it?”

“In the miscellaneous correspondences of Governor Pelham – one hundred years off the mark! How do you suppose that?”

“Maybe, it was given to him? I could say... this is good! Walk with me to Mrs. Phelps' house. I must change before my chairman sees me.” Clara took her long silk scarf and draped it over Dr. Lawson's shoulders to cover the dirt on the upper part of her blouse. Then she picked Lawson's hat from the floor and dusted it off.

On their way down, the two discussed the pneumatic mechanism for the carillon. Clara began by saying,

“I see how this works! The air is compressed by the electric motor, filling the metal tank. When a key on the console is depressed, air travels up the tubes. I suppose it presses against a piston that actuates the striker?”

“Yes, Miss Armistead. Dr. Powell and his volunteers fixed leaks in the tubes and rebuilt the valves that allow air to flow. The tiny tubes from the keyboard control the valves, except in the opposite way. When the key is depressed, the pressure in the small tubes is lost, and the valve opens letting the air from the reservoir pass up to the strikers. Dr. Powell loves this thing! I tell you, he does!”

“Do you love Dr. Powell?” Professor Lawson stopped on a step and turned to Clara. She half-smiled, and then changed the subject.

“As I was saying, Dr. Powell spends all his free time working on this contraption, and he will make it play again. I know it!”

“Ask him over for tea!”

“Miss Armistead! You have not been listening to a word... but if it pleases you, I will.” Clara beamed. Upon reaching the floor of the tower, the ladies found Dr. Powell and his volunteers waiting. Professor Lawson said,

“If you can still hear me, I want to bring to your attention the lamentable fact that your enterprise begrimed me more so than usual. In order that you might make amends, you must come over for tea Saturday afternoon. I hope you will remember that after your ears stop pounding?” Clara interjected,

“That’s right, Dr. Powell! You mustn’t disappoint a lady friend.” He replied,

“Oh, of course not, Clara!” Professor Lawson frowned and said,

“Dr. Powell, we do not call students by their first names.” Puzzled, he stammered,

“But I’ve known her since she was a little thing?”

“It does matter. We are not in the Armistead House at the moment, sir. Behave yourself like the fine gentleman you are supposed to be... rather, that you are. Remember that when you speak with the reporter from the *Messenger*.

“Reporter?” Clara directed the gentlemen’s attention towards the gates saying,

“Here comes Mr. Churchill. I think the commotion startled the whole town. Do tell him every detail of your noble undertaking. Maybe, some fine citizen will offer a donation to offset your expenses?” Professor Lawson interrupted,

“He has a camera! Let’s go, Miss Armistead, before our part in this comic mishap is memorialized.”

On their stroll back to Mulberry Avenue, they took the path behind the Science Building to avoid being seen. Clara’s efforts to make Professor Lawson presentable were only partially effective. Adding to this, nearly the entire school saw her stumble out onto the balcony holding her ears. She had always maintained the façade of the proper lady even though the times afforded less formality. Deep down, however, her true nature was far more adventurous. Proper ladies did not usually grease pneumatic pistons in clock towers.

Professor Lawson boarded at the home of a widow, Mrs. Phelps. It was a spacious dwelling, two stories high, and in the popular Queen Anne Style. Julia had nearly all the second story to herself since Mrs. Phelps did not like climbing stairs. There was a housekeeper and a cook, so Julia did not have to bother with these

chores. Nevertheless, Mrs. Phelps played bridge every night after dinner and Julia was required to participate. During these games, Mrs. Phelps discoursed on the various eligible gentlemen of the town in an effort to find Julia a husband. This is a triviality in itself; however, in the matter of Julia's scheduled tea with Dr. Powell, it was welcomed news for the kindly widow. So much so, that she had to tell everybody in the neighborhood – that was equivalent to an official announcement to the faculty of Quinley Hogg College. On Sunday morning, Dr. Powell and Julia received congratulations from their peers on their engagement. The two set themselves up by going to church together. Had Julia waited until Friday, or even Saturday, to ask Mrs. Phelps for use of the parlor the news would have lagged behind the event – that is, a pleasant conversation over tea followed by a stroll.

Realistically, the courtship between Julia and Dr. Powell had been ongoing for years, and it wasn't a secret to anybody. They had their lunch with each other; they went on long walks together, and both worked on the carillon. It was all in plain view with the general approval of all, particularly the students. The problem with this match was twofold: Dr. Powell was a perpetual bachelor who had never seriously expended effort on a courtship in his entire life. Growing up the only child in a motherless home, he spent his early years entertaining himself. Far from being withdrawn, he was liked by his schoolmates for the same reason that Clara was universally liked by her professors and classmates at Quinley Hogg. He was sincere, and always optimistic. However, at the same time, he busied himself with his own projects passionately to the detriment of his social life. Julia was, of course, Julia, and was not inclined to commit herself to anything permanently. Her association with Dr. Powell, nevertheless, made her feel more at home with discussing a field she had abandoned earlier, namely, music. He also enjoyed history, and was always eager to listen to her speak at length on obscure past events. Needless to say, this match required a push and the invitation to tea that Clara suggested was sufficient. Now, it was poised to happen that weekend.

After Professor Lawson changed, she returned to the porch to speak with Clara about her find.

“Professor Lawson, if the settlers from Charleston died of smallpox, where do you suppose they are buried?” She replied,

“The parish of St. John wasn’t established until 1750, so their graves might be anywhere here, or up the river. If the brief reference in the letter is accurate, most likely on the outskirts of the village. This was all wooded then. I don’t think it would have been this far. Certainly, they had a burying ground before the church yard. I’ve never given it much thought since there are few records from that time.” Clara pondered that thought, and said,

“Imagine, before all this, a few cabins out there on the river – maybe, in just the space of a block or two. Think of how lonely it must have felt at night surrounded by forests of pines on the sandy hills.”

“Have you not been alone, Clara?”

“I’m alone most of the time, but by choice. What I mean is more than alone – more than loneliness. Friendless, in a strange and frightening place, with nowhere to flee, and abandoned: that is what I mean.” Professor Lawson looked down the avenue in the direction of the college, and said,

“I know how that feels. When my father left me at the conservatory, I had just turned seventeen. For four years, I stayed there year round, except over Christmas. Even so, that first night, I’ll never forget... nor will I forget teaching grade school. I was very lonely, and it didn’t get any better as the months dragged into years. By the sixth year, the children’s faces looked the same to me. Then, I went home.”

“Then you came here?”

“No, I went back to college to study history – I have always been good at that. Music and math seem to go together, but teaching children made me tire of both. I continued my education in history to earn a Master’s Degree, and here I am teaching history... you never know, Clara.”

“That is the second time you called me ‘Clara.’ You really shouldn’t scold Dr. Powell for his informality. He is a very close friend of the family. Would you believe he taught me how to fly a kite?”

“That does not surprise me.”

“He is right for you, if I can say such a thing – excuse me for being so bold.” Professor Lawson paused, and then looked at her directly. Stopping short of an affirmation, she then diverted the conversation to research.

“I recall reading a short article in an old issue of the *Gilridge Herald*. I don’t recall the exact date, but it was from around 1850. It concerned a find made by men building a brick culvert alongside the town square. While digging, they uncovered a line of poles buried several feet down. It appeared to be the remains of a palisade wall.” Clara asked,

“Do you think it was a relic from the early times?”

“It must have been. There was no need for a fort by the time the town was incorporated. I have wondered why that particular block has always been the town square. It is removed from the center.”

“Funny you should mention it, Professor Lawson. My father said the town council recently approved plans to have it fitted with a fountain and stone benches. The walks will be paved with brick, matching the old town hall. A convenient opportunity, I might say. If they uncover part of the old palisade, the remains could be preserved as an artifact from the days of the pioneers who settled the town. That is, if they know to look for it.”

“Splendid idea! I’ll talk to Dr. Powell about it tomorrow. He would enjoy helping me for a change – well, nevertheless; he will.” Clara laughed.

Their conversation ended when Professor Lawson returned to the college to teach her afternoon class. Clara bade her good-bye, and returned home. Sadly, their brief moments of camaraderie

finished forever with a casual parting of ways on a pleasant September afternoon.

September 15, 1918. After enduring the general jubilation over their “surprise” engagement, Professor Lawson and Dr. Powell went for a walk down Mulberry Avenue in the direction of the river. Struggling to say something, after a long silence – so long that it misled Dr. Powell into thinking she was angry, Julia said,

“Dr. Powell, since the opportunity has been forced upon us; do you have any reasons that would cause you not to marry me?” Dumbfounded, he mumbled something unintelligible to himself, then promptly tripped on a curb stone and fell in the street. She bent down to help him.

“Well, William? Say what you are supposed to say...”

“What am I supposed to say?” She shook her head and put her hand over her face.

“Ask me to marry you. Here, take my hand... it is supposed to be chivalrous, so it will fill my heart with warm... uh,

“Blood?”

“No! Just ask me?”

“Professor Lawson, would you...”

“No!” Puzzled, he asked,

“You will not marry me?”

“Of course, I’ll marry you! Call me Julia! See, you ruined it... pick yourself up, and try it again. I will not have a gentleman propose to me while sitting in the street. It is not done that way! Now, get up, hold my hand, and propose to me in a decent fashion. Forget that you know my answer.” Dr. Powell stumbled to his feet, reclaimed his dignity, and took Julia’s hand. Then, placing his arm gently around her, he said,

“Julia, it would be an honor of the utmost sort if you accept my humble proposal of marriage.” Julia frowned, and said,

“Yes... ‘Of the utmost sort,’ William...” She quickly kissed him on the cheek, then mumbled, “It took you long enough...”

“Julia, what happens next?” Her brow wrinkled as she pondered his question. Without knowing it, she adjusted the lapel of his coat, and smoothed it flat. He asked,

“Let’s go back and see the reverend.”

“He is probably sitting down to dinner, William. We should ask Mrs. Phelps what to do next, then make some ice cream... do you want ice cream, dear?”

“My-my, maybe we should continue our stroll. Then, we’ll visit Reverend Smallwood.”

“William, you have me in such a dither that I can hardly think.” She pulled away from him suddenly, and took a deep breath. “Walk me home, and let me rest my brain. While I’m doing that, see if you can persuade the reverend to come for tea and ice cream. Then, with Mrs. Phelps, we can make arrangements. Let’s not dilly-dally with details. William, you love me don’t you?” Without hesitation, he replied,

“Yes! Do you think I would have asked you to marry me if I didn’t?”

As unusual as it might seem, the misunderstanding that set in motion the engagement of Dr. William Powell and Professor Julia Lawson, was good fortune in disguise. When approached by well-wishing friends at church, neither made any attempt to correct the rumor. Both wanted it to be true.

By Monday evening, it was official. The faculty and students of the college applauded the match which was long expected. The marriage was tentatively set for the first Saturday in November. The influenza epidemic, however, dashed their plans.

Sunday night, Clara ached throughout her body to such a degree; she could not move from her bed. Across town, Emma Gales was delirious with a fever that had soared to 103 degrees since the afternoon. Her fits of coughing intensified as the night wore on. About 1:30 A.M., her frightened landlady called for the doctor. Upon entering Emma's room, he found the young woman desperately gasping. Her face was acquiring a bluish tinge. She was rushed to the hospital. Through the night, Clara's symptoms became worse. Her throat was raw, and she experienced violent bouts of sneezing. Her parents tried to provide relief by administering various remedies to no avail. By morning, her nose was bleeding profusely. Her frightened father called the doctor. She, too, was transported to the hospital immediately. Her symptoms would follow the same course as those of Emma during the next day.

On Monday afternoon around four o'clock, Emma died. Clara struggled through the night, but succumbed at the moment the morning sky became discernible. She passed with her parents close at hand watching helplessly. Emma died with a nurse sitting at a distance beside an opened window. The nurse contracted the illness within days, but survived.

The doctors of Gilridge recognized that both young women had died of influenza. Having struck in other towns along the railroad, they expected it would arrive in their community eventually. It was Wednesday before they made an official announcement. By that time, twenty-three cases had been diagnosed in the town and five at the college. Thankfully, they had no further deaths to report, but that would change.

September 19, 1918. News of Clara's death was transmitted to the college by retired chancellor Dr. Polk, a friend of the Armistead family. It was very difficult for the elderly gentleman to deliver the sad news to his successor. Having watched this sweet child grow to womanhood was a pleasure for him. Its tragic conclusion he found unbearable. Never again would he see her wave to him when he

walked out on the porch, nor would there be any more lively conversations about Shakespeare. How could this be? Somehow he had neglected to mourn the deaths of the three young men from Mulberry Avenue that had died in the war. In the days following this sorrowful visit to campus, he deeply pondered the connection between the war and the epidemic. As influenza cut down more of the town folk, Dr. Polk lost his optimistic views about the trajectory of culture, and became fatalistic. His wife remained his steadfast source of humor, but nothing she said during this time diverted him from his cynical reasoning.

Dr. Powell received the news from the family at almost the same time as Dr. Polk. He immediately rushed over to Mrs. Phelps to tell Julia. She gasped on hearing it, and had to be helped to a chair. William tried to tell her what had happened, but fell silent when he could not endure speaking. A hollow feeling consumed him. Julia lifted herself to her feet; then stood silently looking at William, all the while wringing her hands. When he struggled to resume speaking, Julia threw her arms around him and held tightly. She spoke in a labored whisper,

“William, see me to my room. I need to be alone – please understand.”

With Mrs. Phelps taking the lead, William ascended the staircase holding Julia. On reaching her room, she entered and closed the door behind her without saying a word. Mrs. Phelps took William back downstairs to the parlor, and sat him in a chair. She left the room, and returned with a tray containing a glass of soda water and a bottle of aromatic spirits of ammonia. She carefully removed the dropper from the bottle and placed two drops in the soda. Handing it to him, she said,

“Drink this, Dr. Powell. It will help your nerves.” Without thought, he took the glass and started to drink the concoction. After thanking her, he downed the glass, and then excused himself with a slight bow.

September 20, 1918. From the office of the chancellor came the announcement in small white envelopes addressed to each member of the faculty. They were hand-delivered in person by the chair of each department. The notes, written in an elegant script, said nothing more than “Clara Armistead passed after a sudden illness.” Notices such as this became a daily routine the next week.

William wanted to check on Julia before walking to campus. He found her waiting for him on Mrs. Phelps’ porch.

“William, let us speak for a moment before we go. Having to tell the students that their beloved classmate died is a dreadful task.” Upon reaching the steps of the porch, William paused; then removing his hat, he said,

“Regrettably, this happens, Julia. Most of the time, it is a student whom we taught a semester or so earlier... sometimes, a graduate from that class or another... a retired colleague, or one we did not know that well. Even so, from time to time, there is an empty desk in one of our classes, and the colleague who passed suddenly was one we saw in the halls a day earlier. Now, we have the boys who sign up and are expected to be back at their studies in several semesters; and after a while, we stop thinking about them... sometimes. We get the news from their parents – the local boys, certainly! With those from other parts, the news might come secondhand. Sometimes, it does not come until a curious person makes the effort to ask. Now, the little girl across the street is gone. As much as it hurts, we need to be there for the rest.” Julia came down from the porch and started walking with him to the college. Looking ahead, she said,

“She was like a sister – so wonderful and caring. Oh, I can’t think about it! ... Put your hat on, William. I hope to heavens that you stay well. You cannot leave me all alone – not like...like...I am not going to say!” Taking her hand, William said,

“This morning, I learned that there was another. Her name was Emma Gales. She worked in the railroad office. She was about Clara’s age. The *Messenger* printed a notice from the public health

office stating that the germ has been traveling along the railroad southward. Where it has struck, many have died within days. If it spreads here, the college will close.”

“Why not close it today, William? It will be no different here than any other place.” Looking at her over his spectacles, William asked,

“Then, where do you want to go? The mountains, perhaps? You could catch it on the train getting there. When the students decide to leave, that is what will happen. Tell me, Julia, how did Clara catch the germ? She spent all her time on campus or at home.” Julia suddenly gasped. Turning to William, she said,

“No, she didn’t! She visited the state archives last week.”

“It doesn’t matter, Julia. It’s here; it’s there; soon, modernity will take it to the remote corners of the Earth.” Taking his arm, she looked down at the ground and mumbled,

“We should ask Reverend Smallwood to marry us without undue distractions at the earliest moment. Perhaps, Saturday – no, that’s Clara’s funeral! Early next week? Do you agree?” William replied,

“If that is what you want, we will see him together after Sunday services.”

Clara was very personable, and her participation in campus life was full in every respect. Having spent her undergraduate years at Quinley Hogg, she was considered something of a fixture in its social life. Clara had almost completed her thesis, and planned to defend it in the spring. That would have made her the fifty-first woman to earn a graduate degree from the college, and the first from the Department of History & Geography. Her death prompted the chair of the department, Dr. Edward White, to pledge on his honor to finish her work.

An unexpected offshoot of her sudden death was the realization that Clara did not have a circle of close friends, nor were any of her school mates sure that she had a beau. Some said he was at war, and others thought she had been engaged at one time. Her

parents, Jane and Andrew Armistead, politely avoided the question. While invariably participating in the planning of every social event, Clara remained remote. She was always serving, cooking, greeting, and presiding – but never actually casually enjoying the social life. As engaging and empathetic as she was, at no time did she share her inner thoughts. Pretty and approachable, yet none of the fellows admitted to courting her. Why? Nobody knew. There was little time to consider this question.

Before her memorial service, influenza was loose on campus. There were four cases reported on Friday, and six on Saturday. The next death, a young gentleman named Rudy Mallard, was announced on Monday. He was a very popular senior who played the trumpet exceptionally well. On Tuesday, there were two deaths to report, Mildred Yeats, a young lady who was quite tall and athletic. She was vice president of the Literary Club and was reportedly something of a prankster. Milton Pratt, her beau, died an hour later. Very likely, they picked up the germ together on an outing downtown. There, *la grippe* was making significant progress in the haunts of young folk, particularly the eating houses and picture show situated near the depot. Wednesday brought an even longer list of casualties at the college, and classes were suspended. Students started leaving first in groups of two or three, then *en masse*. By Friday, September 27, Mr. Lyle distributed a supplemental announcement stating that the college would be officially closed on Monday morning. This time it was a placard printed in bold black and red lettering posted in every campus building. Students who were unable to return to their homes were advised to seek lodging with local families. Notification of the resumption of classes would be sent out by post and published in newspapers throughout the state several days in advance. One student, a young lady name Alice Cowan, disappeared without telling a soul. The college notified the authorities, but she was never found. She unexpectedly returned in the spring, but left after two weeks.

The white envelopes were distributed by the chancellor's aid, Mr. Lyle, to the department chairs before morning classes. During

the day, they were given to faculty members with instructions to read the note to their classes. This proved to be a painful protocol for students who had to hear the announcement read in each class. With each day, the number of classmates that had died in the hospital grew. By the time Dr. Powell received his handful of envelopes, the faculty and students in his department had received word through other sources.

September 21, 1918. The memorial service for Clara Armistead was understandably poorly attended, and should not have taken place. Several days were to pass before public gatherings were curtailed. Even so, all present wore white cotton masks that covered the nose and mouth. Health officials started distributing them on Thursday. The college received their stock on Friday. Actually, they were useless protection against influenza, but they offered some psychological benefit. Julia and William arrived early, and both viewed the body before the undertaker sealed it for the service. Clara was dressed in a white gown with lace sleeves. The undertaker put a bouquet of flowers in her hands. Julia placed her finger tips upon the coffin and gazed down, studying Clara's features like an artist painting a portrait. In a way, she was... trying to engrave the image of her young protégée on her mind.

"William," she whispered, "only Thursday we were sitting on the porch talking about being alone in a fearful place – that is, like the first settlers of the town. The terrible nights in the wild are what she was imagining." William came closer. He pulled the mask down from his face, and said,

"I'm not afraid of her." Julia looked at him, and then removed her mask completely. She whispered,

"We are brave... it doesn't matter. She gave me a handkerchief the other day to wipe my face. It is in my sleeve. I would like to return it to her while I can, but it would be improper to do so without permission." William was taken aback by this statement and said,

“Surely, you don’t mean that. If she gave it to you, the gesture means even more now. Honor her by using her gift to wipe your tears.” Julia had fought them back, but they had started to trickle down her cheeks. She pulled the handkerchief from her sleeve, dabbed her eyes, and turned away.

The service was brief. Reverend Smallwood refused to wear the mask. His sermon acknowledged all the occasions that Clara had volunteered her time for various functions at the church over the span of her short life. He praised her pursuit of scholarship. His closing remarks were sad,

“Like you, I witnessed her life unfold like a beautiful rose – from a loving child to the most upright example of womanhood I’ve known, young or old. Clara was the type of person this brutal world needs. We cannot question the plan that the Lord has made for creation, but forgetting the meaning of absence might be impossible for man. That all will be brought together again is certain, and maybe then we will realize that absence was an illusion. Nothing that happened actually happened.”

The service concluded, and the procession commenced. The hearse was horse drawn in those days in Gilridge, and several constables on horseback were stationed along the way to the old cemetery. The mourners followed flanking the hearse – gentlemen on the left and ladies on the right – this is, if they were fit to walk the three and a half blocks. The rest followed in special automobiles. Mr. Guthrie, the undertaker, was dressed in frock coat, top hat, and carrying a long silver knobbed walking stick; and the minister, followed him. It was a slight variant of the English funeral procession, but the tradition had persisted in Gilridge for as long as anybody could remember. After the war, it ended abruptly. With Clara, the solemn dignity of the procession was fitting.

At the graveside, Reverend Smallwood recited the prescribed passages from the Book of Common Prayer, and all was done. The mourners dispersed after offering their condolences to Clara’s parents. After that, the Reverend led the parents out of the cemetery so the gravediggers could finish their work. By mid-

October, Mr. Guthrie and every undertaker in town had run out of coffins, and the gravediggers had excavated a trench for the dead that measured sixty feet in length.

September 26, 1918. Julia and William postponed their conversation with Reverend Smallwood. After Clara's funeral, both were apprehensive about discussing marriage when thoughts about her tragic end weighted heavily upon their minds. On Monday morning, they were thrown into the mounting tensions on campus. General panic had not overtaken the student body at this point, but the appearances of cases disrupted the well-ordered routine and made studying nearly impossible. It did not help that any student complaining of a headache or sore throat was rushed off to the infirmary for observation. The chancellor's announcements were heavy blows that engendered a feeling of helplessness. Where could they go? The few cases on campus bore little comparison to the clusters that were emerging in remote corners of the town. While the railroad district and the port bore the heaviest number of reported cases, the infection was making progress in the textile village five miles to the southeast. The first cases from the uptown mansion district demonstrated how the epidemic could leapfrog over a large swath of urban neighborhoods and land in the suburbs. Now, it was following the line of the trolley, and the daily routines of the most mobile élite. The *Messenger*, thanks to the efficient officer of public health, Dr. Bates, issued the new reports morning and evening. The administration of the college instituted a prohibition against students and faculty from traveling into the infected areas. By Wednesday, students in the dormitories were forbidden from leaving campus. The doctor from the infirmary started daily examinations of all students living on campus. This amounted to the residents standing in line in the hallway to have their nose and throat examined. The slight snuffle would mean the student was sent to the infirmary. Given the seriousness of this pronouncement, some reacted, as though they were selected to face a firing squad. There were a few tearful good-byes and impromptu last testaments that countered any benefit the doctor hoped to achieve by conducting the examinations.

When Friday came, it was apparent that some the students who had been sent to the infirmary had died in the county hospital. Throwing all caution to the wind, the students started leaving in large numbers. Ironically, the sum of deaths in Gilridge at this point was small compared to the cases reported. Nevertheless, like the general population, many students thought it time to get out of town while they had a chance. By noon that day, the administration could no longer stem the tide. The student body was in full retreat; and by three o'clock that afternoon, it was a rout. The majority that left at that time were rushing to the depot to get their tickets on the six o'clock express. The railroad had no reservation about selling all the tickets they could, so the students were packed into the cars – any seat they could afford. From the first class, to the smoking car, to the second class cars, they cheerfully rubbed shoulders with representatives of all classes hurtling through time and space with *la grippe*. Of course, it was there! It was there at the ticket office, there on the concourse, there on the platform, and in every car. Not everybody who was exposed caught the germ, and not everybody who caught it died; however, those that caught it carried it to their families and communities.

Dr. Powell contracted influenza on Thursday. He woke up with body aches that morning, but walked to the college without much thought about it. Around noon, he developed a pounding headache; and an hour later, started to sneeze. At a quarter of two, he decided to go home. On the walk back, he felt even worse. Passing Mrs. Phelps' house, he was met by the housekeeper, Susie. She told him,

"Miss Julia is sick today, sir. She's been in bed all the morning, hacking and coughing her head off. She has a fever, too." William held up both hands, and said,

"Stay where you are, Susie! I have it!"

"Is there anybody to take care of you, sir?"

"No, there isn't. Even so, don't worry about that. I can fend for myself; and if it gets to where I can't, I have a telephone. Tell

Miss Julia, I'll be back to marry her! Don't forget to tell her that." Susie, waving to him, said,

"I will tell, sir! You can count on me. God bless you! Now, get yourself in bed."

Susie watched as Dr. Powell walked away, dragging his aching body with every step. She mumbled to herself,

"Stubborn man, you can't take care of yourself – such a terrible fix without a woman to look after you. The poor thing is up there in a worse way, but it is better you don't know. You'll be meeting her soon."

Dr. Powell struggled into his house. His head was pounding so intensely that he didn't want to keep his eyes open. Still, he built a fire in the stove in his study, and threw a blanket around himself. It was eighty degrees outside, but he was shivering. After resting on the couch for what seemed to him to be an hour, he staggered to the toilet, then repaired to the kitchen. Even though his throat was burning, he managed to eat three slices of cured ham washed down by an equal number of shots of whiskey. Looking out the window, he saw that it was past sunset. Though miserably sick, he did not think the flu had struck him severely. After returning to his study, he loaded up the stove with coal, and when back to the couch. After he had fallen asleep, the sun rose. He had been sleeping since the afternoon of the previous day.

Julia was following the dreadful course of Clara and Emma. Her fever rose to 103 degrees, and the spells of coughing were so long and violent that she was left gasping for breath desperately after each bout. She hallucinated about being buried alive, clawing at the air as if trying to dig out of a grave, and muttering, "Stop them, Clara! Don't let them do it!" The doctor visited several times, and gave her an injection to calm her. That was all he could do. Mrs. Phelps begged him to take her to the hospital, but the doctor replied he could put her on the list. Reckoning she would be dead before there was a free bed, he advised Mrs. Phelps to purchase a coffin before the price for a good one became too exorbitant.

Reluctantly, she did. It was delivered on Saturday, and placed on the floor in the parlor. Repeatedly, Julia would ask Mrs. Phelps,

“Where is William? He’s not dead, is he? Oh no, don’t tell me! He promised he wouldn’t leave me! Where is he?” Mrs. Phelps replied,

“He’s sick, too, but recovering quite well.” Actually, she didn’t know. Julia returned with the same desperate pleading over and over,

“I must take care of him! He must get well.” Mrs. Phelps then lied,

“We have been visiting him daily. Others in the neighborhood are seeing after him. Don’t worry!”

Dr. Powell was disoriented, having slept through the day, dawn to dusk, thinking no considerable amount of time had passed. The fever and chills came in waves, and his head ached constantly. His nose ran perpetually, and his handkerchiefs would become like soaked dish rags quickly. Not once did he attempt to climb the steps up to his room. It required too much ambition. His fits of coughing, though, were not severe. When he woke from the long sleeps, it took all his will to eat something. The ham was the easiest food at hand. Still, he found it difficult to exert the energy to slice it. The whisky seemed to numb his throat after enduring the initial burning.

September 30, 1918. The college was officially closed. At around nine o’clock in the morning, Julia was unable to breathe. Mrs. Phelps tried everything she could think of to induce respiration. After slapping Julia on the back heavily repeatedly, she began coughing up blood tinged fluid and mucus. Down the street, William woke up completely drenched in perspiration. He had a terrible sounding cough and was short of breath, but the haze had finally lifted from his mind. For the first time since Thursday, he could climb the stairs to his bedroom. After splashing water on his

face and changing his clothes, he returned downstairs to make a telephone call to his neighbor, Dr. Polk. His wife answered, and then provided him with a detailed description of what had transpired over the weekend. Thinking it was Friday, he was shocked to learn that he had been unconscious on the couch the entire weekend. Immediately, he asked about Julia. Mrs. Polk suddenly fell silent. After whispering to another lady in the room, she said,

“William, I don’t know this for certain – there has been nothing in the paper to substantiate it, and you know how thorough they are – but there was a coffin delivered to Mrs. Phelps house on Saturday. Dalton can’t keep still; refuses to wear the mask they gave us; and is going out right now, despite what I say. He might as well go down the street to Mrs. Phelps’ place. I can imagine how glad he’ll be to hear that you are still alive. We were thinking about calling the police when you didn’t answer the phone.” Puzzled, William asked,

“You called?” She replied,

“Why, dozens of times! Is your ring broken? Oh, here comes Dalton...” Mrs. Polk spoke loudly to her husband while standing close to the telephone mouthpiece. In a loud voice, she said,

“Dalton, this is Dr. Powell on the phone. He said he is alive.” Dr. Polk replied,

“If he is talking on the telephone, you can take his word for it. I’m assuming he took ill?” Mrs. Polk returned to talking to William.

“Were you terribly sick, William?” He replied,

“I am sick now! It looks like it has been that way for days and I didn’t know. Please ask Dr. Polk about Julia.” Mrs. Polk, turning the direction of her conversation back to her husband, asked,

“Dalton, he’s asking about his intended, Miss Lawson. Could you venture on down the street to check on her?” He asked,

“You didn’t tell him about the coffin?”

“Yes, I did.” After a moment’s silence, Dr. Dalton spoke into the telephone loudly,

“William, I am going on down there right now! Don’t worry about that coffin. I have been out and about in this damn plague, and there is nothing that amazes me anymore. Mrs. Phelps purchased that coffin on the advice of some quack. He said the undertakers were going to run out of them – imagine that! Well, Lydia Phelps has a kind heart, and you know. She sent word to Mr. Guthrie by Susie saying, ‘That sweet lady is not going to be buried in any old box. Pick out the best you have on hand, and I’ll pay you cash at the door.’ But you see, William; he has not been back to pick it up.” Mrs. Polk interjected,

“She was thinking in advance!” These words were hardly comforting to William. Dr. Polk continued,

“As I was saying, your lady friend is alive by our reckoning. Of course, we need to verify that conclusion with direct observation. I am going out right now to check on her. Talk to Mrs. Polk for a while until I return.” Dr. Polk put his wife back on the telephone. She picked up her account of the events that had transpired over the last few days, with frequent corrections provided by the lady with her that she failed to introduce.

In essence, influenza was rampant in the town, but the death count was still quite low – only thirty-five since it started. The number of reported cases, however, topped two hundred. In an apartment building near the railroad, seventeen residents contracted the flu over the weekend. The building was quarantined. Passengers on the trains were warned not to stray into infected districts. The hotels on the south side of the town, nearly two and a half miles from the depot were allowed to serve the traveling public, but news had spread that Gilridge was now an infected town. Hotel patronage in general was reduced to a daily handful. William was unaware that the college was closed. Mrs. Polk described how it started spontaneously on Friday. There was a small staff remaining on campus to keep the place from falling to pieces, but the gates

were closed. When Dr. Polk returned after a half-hour, he took over the conversation.

“William, your intended is alive. That is the best I can say. I talked with Lydia Phelps, and she said that you needed to stay put. She had been telling Julia all along that you were alive, and it relieves her to know that it wasn’t a bold face lie. Julia is in a terrible state of suffering, but it seems better today than Sunday. We will have to wait and see. Lydia feels fine, and wondered why the germ is sparing her. I wonder why it is sparing our household. Nevertheless, I’ll keep checking for you. Just answer your telephone. Lydia plans to have one in her house after this. Susie went home Friday night, and did not come back. She wasn’t on today’s death list, but... well; you disappeared from sight for four days.” William asked,

“How are you getting the newspaper?”

“They sell it off the back of a truck. The newsboys are gone. However, William, this is just the start of it. I’ll telephone you tomorrow.”

After speaking with Dr. Polk, William felt relieved to know that Julia was alive. Now, he could worry and fret in misery until the next telephone call. There was nothing left to do but retire to his bed.

Julia was quiescent for most of the day, but her mind worked upon her frightening delusions. Clara, the distant figure in white holding a bouquet, beckoned her to follow. Julia could see herself as from above dressed like her in repose. “Alone and friendless in a strange hostile world,” she thought. Those thoughts seemed to be on Clara’s mind the last day that they talked. Now, it had come true for both. Then, Mrs. Phelps would call her back from the terrors of the Underworld. Moving her listless body like a marionette; spoon feeding her like an infant; the elderly woman loomed over her like a giant.

October 1, 1918. Before sunrise, Julia had the most chilling hallucination. A group of townsfolk broke into the room, and pulled off the blankets that covered her. One of their number, a large man with cowhide gloves, took hold of her ankles and yanked suddenly, sending her to the floor. The citizens stretched out a bed sheet; then the man roughly rolled her body into its center. Gathering up the corners, they carried her out of the house and down Mulberry Street to the cemetery road. There, they dropped her on the ground. The women of the group came forward, and picked over her. They pulled off her slippers, and took her ring. They took her housecoat, and the silk kerchief that tied back her hair. They stripped her down to her undergarments. Having taken everything of value, they gathered up the edge of the blanket and carried her over to a pit. After tossing her inside, the gloved man jumped in and kicked her into proper alignment, and then he climbed out. Did they think she was dead? She tried to call out to them, "Stop! I'm alive!" Her mouth moved, but she could not speak. The first shovel load of earth struck her body; every nerve in her screamed in pain; and after that, the dirt was heaped on her face. She could not see; she could not hear or speak - her eyes and throat burned intensely, the pain increasing everywhere at once... the weight upon her chest was crushing her... then; all slipped away into nothingness. She awoke with a gasp! The sunlight bathed the room with an intense yellow-orange glow. Mrs. Phelps rushed forward, sat her up, and slapped her back rigorously. Julia had survived, but her struggle was far from over.

October 11, 1918. Julia had survived influenza, and was fortunate that subsequent pneumonia had not done her in. Her coughing fits were violent, and they left her light-headed and panting. The slightest exertion could cause her to become winded; and on several occasions, she fainted. Mrs. Phelps caught her once, preventing her head from impacting the floor. Julia's weight dropped significantly over the weeks of her illness. Throughout, Mrs. Phelps stayed by her side and did not contract the illness. As for Susie, she was gone. As with many, she likely fled town.

William, like Julia, hacked constantly. His eyes and nose watered; he suffered a pounding in his ears so painful that it made the slightest movement intolerable. His illness was not life threatening as had been the case with Julia. It was that way everywhere: some died quickly, or survived influenza then died of pneumonia; others experienced it in various degrees of severity, and there were those that were exposed to its victims, but remain healthy. Regardless, the Spanish Flu tore through great swaths of humanity like a Biblical plague.

The world outside the east end of Mulberry Avenue was nearly paralyzed. The population of Gilridge when the college was in session was approximately 22,000 souls. By the beginning of the second week of October, about 13,500 people remained. The *Messenger* stopped printing on October 9, but posted its daily list of the dead on a board outside the subscription office. Most of the town folk that could leave took off in all directions. The sick and those caring for them remained in disproportionately high numbers. Dr. Bates, the health officer, estimated that one-third of the remaining citizens of the town were ill. By October 10, the death toll had reached one hundred and ninety-four. At this time, a general quarantine was put into effect. Passenger trains were not permitted to stop at the depot. Instead, they proceeded to a coal and water station ten miles further down the track. The textile mill closed when the supply of cotton was depleted in the first week of October. In the surrounding mill village, the number of cases of influenza exceeded the total for the entire downtown except for the railroad district. The sanitation department assumed the task of delivering coffins to the mill village— actually simple pine boxes. Orders had to be submitted by telephone. The boxes were delivered by truck to the front door of the family that made the request. Dr. Bates issued an order that cotton wadding was to be stuffed into the mouth, nostrils, and ears of the dead before placing them in the coffin. The bodies were picked up on the return trip several hours later. After a brief examination at the county morgue, the corpses were transferred to canvas sacks, returned to the boxes, and transported to the mass grave in the county cemetery. The names of the dead were stamped on a metal tag attached to the lid

of the coffin. Various ministers of different denominations from the town volunteered to read a prayer for the dead before the grave digger shoveled on thin layers of dirt and lime. The names of the dead were entered into the cemetery registry, and that was it. One of the gravediggers prepared on his own initiative a map of where each body was buried in the event one or several needed to be exhumed. Later, it was appended to the registry. Disposing of the dead was burdensome; but caring for the sick so overwhelmed the doctors of the town that many who contracted the illness died before they could receive proper medical care.

The hospital was a three-story brick building that was designed to treat about one-hundred patients at one time, but rarely had more than sixty. During the height of the epidemic, the average daily number of patients exceeded the limit. The entire hospital staff worked around the clock. Two doctors contracted the disease – one of them died. Six nurses and four staff members died of influenza and pneumonia. There was a waiting list for hospital beds – first come, first serve. In general, those in the prime of life were apt to die quickly. Those that develop pneumonia after surviving the flu accounted for many of the deaths. In the majority of cases, the patients endured, and recovered. Nevertheless, the number of sick people in town taxed its resources to the breaking point – the doctors, the town government, and the suppliers of basic necessities. A small group of citizens provided aid, and some actually risked infection. Remarkably, only a few contracted the disease. All survived. One of the volunteers was Dr. Polk. He organized a system of stations in each ward of the town for distribution of relief supplies. Ironically, his reckless disregard for his own life made him a hero. The worst weeks of the epidemic were in late October.

William and Julia were sick in a debilitating way then, and for months thereafter. Both could move about inside, but only William attempted brief periods out of doors. The slightest exertion, however, left him winded. He daily tried to contact Julia, but Mrs. Phelps would not permit it. Not realizing how the severity of his

illness had weakened him, he attempted to walk there. Dr. Polk sternly commanded him to return home. He complied.

Days and nights became reversed for William during this time. Frequently, he lost his balance and stumbled. This problem had existed prior to his illness, but it appeared to have grown worse during the protracted recovery from the flu. It would become a permanent infirmity. Julia struggled. While eating normal meals eventually, she was entirely too thin. Her skin was pale and blotchy in places. In general, it was difficult for her to do anything for long, even read. Some days, she was listless; but on others, she managed to read the entire day. All along, she jotted down her notes. Nothing happened at the college during this time. The chancellor made his daily rounds. A dozen employees attended to the care of the campus buildings. Even the chancellor did not venture beyond the gates.

October 27, 1918. On this day, Dr. Polk visited with Julia in Mrs. Phelps' parlor. Though she was dressed for a visitor, her frail appearance was shocking. Immediately, she asked,

"Is William taking care of himself?" He replied,

"No. He is trying to do more than he should."

"But is he recovering?"

"Yes, Julia. If he doesn't try anything foolish – like attempting to see you – he'll be fine. The poor fellow nearly collapsed on the sidewalk trying to make it here on foot. I had to carry him home – and I mean 'carry' literally. Likely, a reunion of the both of you would be mutually beneficial, but Mrs. Phelps thinks you are still too fragile. She does not want you to get your nerves worked up. I'm inclined to agree. Give yourself another week, and let the doctor check you out."

"Dr. Polk, my doctor has not been by since he had Mrs. Phelps order up my coffin."

“Yes, that thing... why is it still in here?”

“It is too heavy for her to move, and I dare not try. I cannot endure looking at it – nice as it is. I appreciate the love she has shown me. This gesture was intended to honor me if the worst happened. Since she has given it to me, I will honor her by keeping it. So, eventually, I’ll be put in it. Even so, there were several times during the past weeks I escaped being its occupant. I tolerate it, but the sight of it frightens me.”

“Do you think William will abide such a thing in the house after the marriage?”

“He might, albeit with some apprehensions... but it certainly will be hidden away out of sight. Dr. Polk, let me speak to you candidly. Nothing will ever be the same after this. It has nothing whatsoever to do about being spared from death. I am certainly grateful! However, I don’t feel like the same person, and I think you know what I mean.” Dr. Polk gazed up at the ceiling for a moment, and then addressed her directly.

“Julia, no... you are the same person. Everything else has changed. Then again, maybe nothing changed. We were deceived into thinking life was something other than what it is. Are we that different from the brutes of our origin? The unseen creatures attack us just the same – culture is nothing, genus is feeble, faith is worthless.”

“Maybe, sir, but I don’t want to think about that.”

“You should. When the students come back, they’ll ask you.”

“I want to see William...”

The college reopened on November 15, 1918, but classes did not resume until January. The fall term was lost. Several faculty members and thirty-one students died during the epidemic. Most of the student body contracted the disease. William and Julia were married on November 23 of that year. The service was brief, and unannounced. Julia was unwilling to wait any longer. By that time, she was approaching a normal weight and was, in general, free of

the most debilitating effects of her long illness. William, however, lost his balance easily, and had to use a walking stick. He had a slight tremor in his right hand, and often looked upward at a corner of the ceiling while he was lecturing. None of these changes were particularly annoying, but they seemed to be permanent.

CHAPTER TWO

March 2, 1921. Jane Armistead, mother of Clara, was biding her time at the café in the Southside Hotel waiting for her husband to return from a meeting with the judge. She was hoping the court would approve their request to have the remains of a young lady exhumed from her grave in Potters Field, and then moved to a plot they had purchased in the main section of County Cemetery. Her name was Emma Gales, and she had died of influenza shortly before their daughter. The county health officer, Dr. Bates, called her “confirm fatality one” and Clara was the second. At the time of her death, she was working for the railroad freight office; but inasmuch as the authorities knew, she died penniless. After no relative came forward to claim her remains, she was classed “indigent” and buried as a pauper. Ironically, fellow employees at the railroad depot had collected enough donations to place her in a proper grave. They were too late. Before they could correct this affront, the epidemic was well underway. Their plans fell by the wayside. Her final resting place would remain amongst the dishonored until Jane became overwhelmed by curiosity. After learning the story from the caretaker of the cemetery, she felt obliged.

There were connections, or coincidences, linking Clara to the freight office clerk that lived in a boarding house. One of Clara’s closest friends from childhood also shared the name Emma Gales. While there were many people in the community across the classes who had the surname Gales, and Emma was a popular name; they unlikely two also shared a common friend, a self-styled social reformer named Alice Cowan. Clara had befriended the brilliant and idealistic Alice at the college. Jane had learned about Emma and her hardships from the diary her daughter left behind. The final and most chilling coincidence that joined the three was all had died (or so she thought). From what she knew, Alice had taken ill with the rest, likely dying at home. Jane did not know that she survived the epidemic months, returned in the spring term briefly, and then

withdrew after a few weeks. These real or imagined connections did not prompt Jane to action. It took a visit to the poor woman's grave. While there, Jane met the only person that came there periodically to place a flower, a young lady from the freight office named Ethel Rouse.

The process of having the remains moved was not a task of irksome complexity, but there was quite a bit of red tape. On examining the relevant county ordinances concerning burial of the indigent, their attorney, Mr. Leland, found nothing that would prevent the couple from having the remains of Emma Gales removed to another plot. Technically, the corpse was unclaimed by relatives or guardians, and she had been buried at the expense of the public. If Jane and Andrew filed a claim on the remains, paid the cost of the original burial back to the county, and indemnified the county against damages, their plan could go forward. They were required to put up a bond to cover all expenses involved with the exhumation, transport, and reinterment; and provide proof that all expenses associated with the new grave site were covered, including administrative costs. After that, the move would be accomplished without difficulty. As long as the reburial conformed to the standards established by the receiving cemetery and annual fees were paid, all would go smoothly.

As the waiter was refilling Jane's coffee, Andrew, her husband, entered the café. He took an envelope from his pocket, removed from it a document, and handed it to her to read. He said,

"We are free to go forward with the exhumation and reburial of Emma Gales. The county coroner and several witnesses must be present for the duration of the proceedings. The earliest it can be done is this Saturday. I will need to notify Mr. Guthrie and Reverend Smallwood this evening if we agree. Having the reverend there is my idea. Regardless of who she was, I want her to have a proper graveside service. After everything is finalized, I will have a notice sent to the railroad announcing the time of the service at the new grave. Surely, some of the ladies she worked with will attend. I will hand-deliver a notice to the attorney for the railroad Friday afternoon. He should be there."

“Andrew, I want to be there throughout.”

“Why, Jane?”

“When I saw her grave, untended, sunken, and marked with a number; I felt heartbroken that her end had no more dignity than that of a dead dog – perhaps, worse, because more likely than not it is the master’s unhappy task to bury the beloved pet. I am aware that this will be a gruesome ordeal, and it might be too much for me, but I want to be there for her. I know that might sound strange to you, but those bones were somebody’s daughter... I wish we had a picture of her, so I could think of her alive.” Andrew reached into the envelope and brought out a photograph that measured the size of a playing card. He said,

“This is a copy of a photograph that the railroad had in their files. Furthermore, there is a physical description of her on this card...” Jane took the photograph and the card accompanying it from Andrew, studied it closely, and said,

“She had chestnut brown hair, and hazel eyes. Taller than Clara, and twenty-two years-old... she looks like a happy girl in the picture, and she was pretty. Do you plan to publish her picture in the *Messenger*?”

“Yes, I do... maybe a relative will come forward. Some of this information may help. I’ll include it. Perhaps, I should also say that she is not Emma Louise Gales that died in France. The confusion that might occur from such carelessness might be hurtful... we don’t want that.”

“Thank you, Andrew. This is right...”

Reverend Smallwood agreed readily to officiate at the graveside service. He was moved by the story of the abandon young woman, the first recorded influenza death in the town. The *Messenger* printed the obituary and photograph with the proper clarification regarding the name of the deceased. It appeared in the Friday evening and Saturday morning editions.

As the couple who lived across the street finalized their plans for the funeral – a funeral for a person who they never met – Dr. William Powell was having a heated conversation with Dr. Edward White, the chairman of the Department of History & Geography. In 1919, after Julia, a lecturer in his department, had recovered from her illness, Dr. White did not renew her appointment. He cited her lack of recent publication as the reason, but everybody knew there were underlying tensions between the two. Fortunately, she found work in Special Collections in the college library. In 1920, she applied to be reinstated as a lecturer; White blocked her application. She tried again in 1921; he blocked her again. This time he dreamed up a derogatory moniker to publicly deride her, the “wildcat.” William, on confronting White about the slight, found him smug and dismissive. William retorted,

“Very well, you do not know; and you do not care! I will leave you to your amusements. Good day to you.” White said,

“They tell me, sir, that you have taken a liking to an attractive librarian.” William turned, and said,

“You are a rascal! My wife is doing well. She is very happy, and her ‘wildcat’ ways are a thing of the past. Never have you met one as sweet and thoughtful as this lady. Miraculous transformation, indeed! It appears a change of venue has improved her disposition considerably. The director of the library is congenial, supportive, and a gentleman of high principals. Yes, that is all it took! If you’ll excuse me, there is an “attractive librarian” waiting for me.

William was so disgusted and infuriated after leaving White that he was unable to speak. When he was cheerfully greeted by one of the graduate students in his department, he grumbled, “White!” When he passed an overgrown shrub, he swatted it with his walking stick, and muttered, “White!” On his way around the carillon tower, he stopped, looked up at the bells, and shook his stick,

“Damn fool contraption!”

At the Mulberry Street gate, Julia was there waiting for him. She didn't have to ask. Taking his arm, they walked home without saying a word.

March 5, 1921. Mr. Guthrie and his men came to the potter's field at six in the morning. They were met by the caretaker of the county cemetery, Mr. Norton Littlefield. He directed them to Emma's grave. There, they waited for the county coroner and witnesses. Jane and Andrew arrived fifteen minutes later; then shortly thereafter, the gravediggers, followed by the coroner and the two witnesses, Mr. Lyle and Mr. Summers. They were friends of Mr. Guthrie; both, veterans of the Great War. They were dressed in their Sunday best.

After a brief discussion, the coroner asked Jane and Andrew whether they would rather wait outside the wall until the work was completed. Jane shook her head. The coroner announced that he would document the exhumation with photographs. Technically, if there was anything unusual, he might have to stop the work and bring in the sheriff. However, he thought it unlikely.

Carefully the gravediggers set to work. The sandy earth that filled the grave was like sugar. They proceeded slowly, excavating a much wider rectangle than the grave. They did this to avoid damaging the fragile coffin and the remains inside. The sand was moist after the gravediggers had removed about four feet. When they reached the coffin, they found its lid broken.

When the pieces of the lid were removed, the coroner halted the exhumation and called the gravediggers up to the surface. The body was missing! The coroner sent Mr. Littlefield back to his office to call the sheriff. He also instructed him to get the names of anyone who might show up for the burial service planned for the afternoon, adding the sheriff should have a deputy posted at the main cemetery to assist him. Picking up a fragment of the shattered lid, he examined it carefully. Turning to Mr. Guthrie, he said,

“It looks to me that they dug down at the head of the grave, broke the lid with a crowbar, and pull the body out through the hole - like grave robbers of old. I imagine it was easy for them. Nobody looks after this place; the gate is open; and it is out of public view. Mr. Armistead, tell me why in the world did you want to have this woman moved?” He answered,

“Simply put, it was a philanthropic gesture. The first victims of the epidemic were she and our daughter. Both should be remembered.” Jane added,

“Besides that, this is a disgraceful way for a young lady to end her days – dumped like garbage into a sand pit, marked with a number, and then forgotten.” Coroner Wilson replied,

“Look around you, Mrs. Armistead. See the regiment of the unloved and forgotten? Regardless of whether they deserved to be here, they died paupers. Not one had sufficient friends willing to scrape together money to have them buried on the other side of the wall. Without looking at the register, I can safely wager that there are a few young ladies out there. This is the result of not having money when you die... and might I add, being cursed with a family that shirked their duty. The public treasury provides what it can to ensure they are not left rotting in the street. That is, good lady, a box, a hole, and a marker... now, we have a mess.”

When Sheriff Tate arrived, the casket was brought up from the grave. The bottom part of the lid was intact. The coffin contained earth that had entered it after the grave was recovered – that was it. The sheriff and coroner agreed that the remains had been removed by grave robbers, and the lack of residue and bones suggested the crime was perpetrated not long after Emma was put in her grave. Nevertheless, on examining the broken fragments of the coffin, Sheriff Tate thought the breaks in the wood looked fresh. Wilson agreed, yet dismissed it as the result of a recent collapse. The lack of decay residual precluded any consideration of recent unearthing of the body. Mr. Guthrie and his men gave their statements, and were allowed to go. The witnesses were not able to add to the statements of the men from the mortuary, so the sheriff took their names, and they were allowed to leave. The coroner and his

assistant loaded the coffin and fragments of the lid into his van. The sheriff then approached Jane and Andrew for their statements. It took more than an hour, and he was left somewhat confused by the tangle of paths that led them to this curious position, having blundered into this “mess.” It seemed so unlikely a crime such as this would have ever been discovered. A philanthropic couple, with the aid of a big-city lawyer, had put in doubt whether any of the graves in Potters Field contained remains. After a few days of fruitless evidence gathering, the caretaker complained to the sheriff that the open grave was a hazard. After prolonged consultations, the gravediggers were allowed to fill in the hole.

Aside from Reverend Smallwood, ladies from the railroad freight office, along with the company attorney, few showed up for the graveside service that did not happen. The ladies were acquaintances of the long deceased; and the attorney was there representing the interest of the company (That is, in the event something of an unexpected nature came to light as a result of this curious act of philanthropy). He came with an offering of flowers for the grave – a gesture by the company that struck Mr. Littlefield as being ridiculously late. On learning that there had been a complication, the attorney placed the flowers on the first grave at hand. It happened to be that of a child who died in 1858.

During the week, the mysterious disappearance of the body of Emma Gales became an object of public curiosity. When the *Messenger* published its sensational story, it proved too fascinating to brush aside. The extraordinary effort by a wealthy couple to have an unfortunate young victim of the epidemic moved from a pauper’s grave was compelling. Yet, finding the remains had been stolen gripped the morbid imagination of the public and kept them coming back. Every day, there was something new: she was the first person to die in Gilridge during the epidemic – few remembered that; an army officer, claiming to be her brother, took away her worldly possessions; and the ladies who worked with her in the freight office said she was in love with a handsome young man who

frequented the Horse Pond known as the “Professor.” It didn’t take long for Sheriff Tate to come a-knocking on Dr. White’s door. His reputation of being popular with the working class ladies caused a stir on campus. It was the type of notoriety that did not play well. Without question, parents avoid sending their daughters to institutions that hire libertines – rumored or confirmed.

Dr. White barely remembered Emma Gales. She was merely a tagalong acquaintance of Liz Rouse, the real focus of his pedestrian romantic interests. The more the name “Emma Gales” appeared in the newspaper, the more it irritated the wealthy parents of the heroic nurse of the same name who died during the war. They had donated a large sum to beautify the old town square as a memorial to their daughter, and could not abide any enduring confusion. Their friendship with Jane and Andrew Armistead became strained.

The reporters of the *Messenger* then turned their attention to the county coroner. Dr. Wilson was forced to dredge up the results of his autopsy. In morbid detail, the newspaper told their readers that Wilson found Emma’s lungs were engorged with blood and fluid. He had surmised that death occurred when they could no longer bring oxygen into her system. It was like drowning. Then, they learned how the coroner’s office had failed to show her remains proper respect. Her body remained in the morgue for a longer time than usual. Nobody claimed her, so she was sent to the Potters Field. The readers were shocked to learn that the young woman, still dressed in a hospital gown, was fit into an unfinished pine box that was too small for her. There were some words said over her grave, but not by a minister. Mr. Randolph, the late superintendent of the county cemeteries, read a few lines of scripture from a card while the gravediggers stood by respectfully. It didn’t seem right. Where were her friends, the people she worked with, and the man she loved? There wasn’t a notice of the burial. The coroner explained to the newspaper reporter that it was an oversight. By the time she was buried, the epidemic was well underway.

March 9, 1921. The sheriff turned his attention to the personnel of the freight office. Emma spent her time working with a number of these ladies. The railroad employed twelve during the weekdays to perform various clerical duties. They worked in an open room with unadorned brick walls and large windows; and bare electric light bulbs hung from wires attached to the ceiling. In the center of the room was a huge circular steam radiator. The uniform of the ladies was a starched white blouse with a long black skirt. As of 1921, management had not adopted any modifications to their 1898 dress code other than allowing the ladies to raise the hemline of their skirts a modest few inches. The men who worked in the office attended to customers. The two freight warehouses located alongside the office, worked entirely by men, handled freight, shipped or received. Items to be shipped were taken to the warehouse where they were weighed, and a bill of lading was prepared. The customer paid the shipping fee, and the paperwork was sent to the freight office to be recorded. When items were received, the freight office sent a notice to the customer, who then had to sign a receipt at the freight office before going to the warehouse to take possession of the shipment. Both the freight office and the warehouses were open on Saturdays, though with a light staff. These details would prove to be important during the investigation.

Emma worked Saturdays in addition to her five weekdays. Only then, did she have to interact with the customers at the front desk. On Saturday afternoons, there were few customers. Emma, an older lady named Polly Allen, and the office manager, Mr. Douglas Hines, worked until six o'clock. When Sheriff Tate decided to interview Mrs. Allen and Mr. Hines about their deceased coworker, the attorney for the company insisted that the proceedings were to take place in his presence. From this meeting, Sheriff Tate learned that Emma was mild-mannered and a naïve girl. She had a high lyrical voice, and often used words in her conversations that sounded similar to each other, but had different meanings – malapropism. Mr. Hines described her as hard-working, punctual, accurate in her work, and very courteous. He could not

imagine that she was capable of anything devious or dishonest. Mrs. Allen, nevertheless, thought that she trusted enough to get herself in trouble if an evil-minded person misled her. Like Hines, she thought Emma was raised in a rural section of the region.

“We told you she said she was from the country. Why not go looking out there – on the farms? Likely, her folks do not get the paper. That is, if they are living.”

The person that they both thought was a bad influence on Emma was another young lady from the freight office named Ethel Rouse, an unapologetic “fun-seeker” and flirt. Mr. Hines, however, did not think Ethel was disreputable; merely, she was not serious about making anything of herself. Even so, he said she was caring. The sheriff recognized her name. She was the only person that visited the grave and left a flower. Jane Armistead described her as being “adorably sweet.” Mr. Hines agreed.

Sheriff Tate interviewed Ethel after lunch. She told him that Emma was a close friend. They spent their Friday nights out on the town meeting up with the fellows from work, and occasionally the soldiers when they were in town. The ladies would go to the Walnut Café to eat and dance. Laughing, she told the sheriff that she had to teach Emma to dance, but she was a quick study. Like Mr. Hines and Mrs. Allen, she said that she thought Emma was a farm girl who had come to town during the war, worked hard, and saved her money. For this reason, Ethel was surprised that she didn’t leave behind enough to receive a proper burial. Nobody knew what happened to her. The paper printed a death notice, and that was the end of it. Ethel produced a clipping from her handbag, and read it.

“‘A young woman of this town, about twenty-one years of age, died in County Hospital after a brief illness. Details withheld pending notification of next of kin.’ That was it, sir! It was published several days after she died. It was all very strange!” Sheriff Tate asked,

“What about the brother who came for her things?”

“That was much later, sir. Maybe a month, or more, I think. Don’t believe it. She never said anything about having a brother.”

March 11, 1921. Sheriff Tate tried to speak with Ethel Rouse again at length during the week, but discovered that she had a talent for eluding him at work. It was almost as though she had lookouts posted waiting for his arrival. On this Friday, she was delivered to him with a handful of weekend revelers caught up in a raid on a speakeasy. It was located one mile outside the town limits. Shortly after eleven o’clock that evening, Sheriff Tate’s deputies descended. Not counting the proprietors of the establishment, which included a middle-aged man, his wife, and teenaged son; there were four couples and five unaccompanied men. Ethel and her date for the evening, a fellow named Herb Peterson, were among those taken up in the raid.

The speakeasy was so inconspicuous as to almost be invisible. Situated behind a gasoline station in an old two-story house, this dispensary of forbidden intoxicants operated on Fridays and Saturdays, and then moved to a different location during the week. It was a strange setup. Patrons purchased glasses of moonshine poured from a gallon jug in the kitchen, and then went to the parlor to drink and socialize. A phonograph provided the only entertainment. Couples danced to the music if they could navigate the obstacles in the tight confines of the room. By four in the morning, the proprietors made a stealthy retreat into the darkness, taking their remaining product with them. Those that lingered, or were too tipsy to move, stayed until daybreak. By sunrise, the place was all but cleared out.

Tate timed the raid early so he could catch the bootlegger delivering the liquor. He knew that as soon as he shut down one hole-the-wall gin-joint another would pop up in another nook of the county. The folks that operated these places were small-time operators, usually dirt farmers trying to make a little cash to tide them over. No part of it could compare to the big-city speakeasies run by professional criminals. He didn’t want to haul in the usual

dozen or so otherwise law abiding citizens that missed their occasional nip. It was the ones that were supplying the booze that he was after. Still, it was a necessary step in discouraging the public from patronizing these establishments. On this evening, his deputies were waiting in the woods when the delivery arrived. No sooner had the driver return from taking his jugs inside; when out of the darkness, the deputies fell upon the rascal with rifles drawn. It was a swift and silent maneuver that left the poor fellow dumbfounded. Quickly, they spirited the fellow away to a car in the woods. Cuffed and hustled into the seat, he was left to ponder his fate under the watchful eye of a deputy armed with a shotgun. Meanwhile, the rest of the deputies nonchalantly entered through the front and back doors. On their appearance, those assembled gave a unison groan. After bringing together the proprietors and patrons from all corners of the building, they were escorted outside to await the arrival of the paddy wagon. It was during this grim interval, that Tate recognized Ethel among the evening's catch. He said,

"Is that Ethel Rouse I see? I've been trying to have a chat with you since the other day. Where have you been hiding yourself?" She replied,

"Well, here I am, Sheriff. You have my undivided attention. What would you like to talk about?"

"Well, I am a little busy at the moment. Have you ever been arrested?"

"No." Tate took Ethel across the yard to a deputy waiting by a car. "Ethel, this is Deputy Fred Wilkes. Fred, this is Ethel Rouse. She is a friend of the family, so to speak – a good girl that happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong fellow." Ethel smiled at the young man, then said,

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Deputy Wilkes." Tate continued,

"Now, if I had a choice in the matter, I would sooner let her go – but I don't. I am going to place her in your custody. Take her in your car. The reporter from the *Messenger* will be on the lookout for the paddy wagon. I don't want her picture in the newspaper.

Better yet, take the long way around to the jail... then, bring her in through the front door like a visitor. Insomuch as it is possible, make sure that she is comfortable. Give her a cup of coffee and a sandwich from the kitchen. See to it that she gets a cell to herself towards the end where it is reasonably quiet.”

“Yes, sir, Sheriff; I will take care of her.” Ethel said,

“This is awfully nice of you, Sheriff. You really shouldn’t be going to all this trouble for me. Really, I’m not as good as you make me out to be.” Tate replied,

“Sure you are. Anybody that puts flowers every week on a grave in Potters Field is somebody special.” Astonished that he knew this, Ethel said,

“Nothing gets by you, Sheriff.” Once again, she presented her adorable, innocent smile. Tate said,

“We are going to have a conversation in the morning. I would do it now; but as you can see, I am occupied with other concerns at the moment.” Without casting his gaze away from Ethel’s face, he said, “Oh, one more thing, Fred... Before you head home, see that her sister gets word that Ethel will be spending some time with us this weekend.”

After Deputy Wilkes left with Ethel, Sheriff Tate turned his attention to the delivery boy he left under guard in the woods. He wasn’t a big fish, but Tate was certain he could provide directions to the right hole to drop his hook. After a lengthy interrogation at the county jail, the young fellow – a farm hand by trade – explained how he was getting the booze. The boss was named Pete. He didn’t know his last name, nor had he ever met him. Every Friday, just after dark, he drove his car out to Sykes Landing, five miles upriver from Gilridge. Not long after he arrived, two men in hoods emerged from the woods with wooden boxes containing four gallon-jugs of liquor each. They gave him an envelope with instructions on where to drop off the jugs – usually two per speakeasy, and some cash for doing the job. Tate was curious as to why he was paid in advance. The young man said,

“I’ve been told that anybody who crosses Pete disappears. He has dozens of fellows doing this work, and all carry small loads – he spreads the risk. If you get caught, don’t think about going back. That’s it!” Tate asked,

“How did you get involved with this in the first place?”

“It’s easy! The folks at the shady saloons sign you up. If you want to make some money, be there when the men in the hoods show up. They’ll blindfold you; walk you out to where their car is parked; and then, you go for a ride. One of them tells you the ins and outs of the job. If you agree to work for Pete, they tell you where to pick up your load. I don’t know what they do if you turn down the offer. Now, there is a catch. If you run liquor, you have to swear off it. After you agree to that, they drop you off about a mile from where you started – still blindfolded. One of the men told me, ‘If you peek before we are long gone, I’ll pick you off as we’re pulling away.’ That’s it, Sheriff.”

March 12, 1921. Sheriff Tate interviewed Ethel Saturday morning. He found her an interesting character to say the least – that is, under the circumstances. While not cheerful to find herself incarcerated for the weekend, her demeanor was pleasant. The pretty brunette was chatty, fidgety, and distractible. Even seated, she moved about as if a dance tune was playing in her head. Generally speaking, she was good natured, slightly mischievous, and a person that was drawn to fun and excitement. Nothing about her was malicious or deceitful. After about a half-hour of listening to her joking and small-talk, Tate asked her about her friend Emma Gales. Immediately, her mood changed. In a sad tone, she said,

“Why did they wait so long to let us know? They didn’t even have enough respect to print a burial notice!”

“It was a frightening time, Miss Rouse. The *grippe* was loose all over town. She fell through the cracks. I suppose it was that way. Still, everybody from the office and the company lawyer showed up the second time.”

“It didn’t mean anything, Sheriff. The damage was already done. While we are at it, I think I ought to tell you something. Don’t believe that story about a soldier claiming to be Emma’s brother coming to pick up her things. His name was Pete, and he was playacting. She was scared of this fellow, and said that he had finally cornered her.” Tate asked,

“Cornered her?”

“Emma discovered something terrible – she never said what. Pete was at the bottom of it. I never heard of this Pete until he showed up out of nowhere and made a scene. Emma and my sister Liz were out on the town; a man in uniform came out of the crowd and grabbed Emma by the arm. As he was dragging her away, she screamed for help. The “Professor”, who was walking between the ladies, took hold of Pete by his belt from the rear, and slung him to the ground. When Pete tried to get up, he kicked him in the stomach. The “Professor” was so enraged that anybody would lay hands on a lady in his presence that he set about thrashing him! When Emma ran off screaming, Liz told the professor to forget about the scoundrel. They had to find Emma. Pete was lucky that time!”

“This is all very interesting to me, Miss Rouse. Tell me; was Emma in love with Professor White?” She paused, then said,

“Emma was in love with the idea of being in love with him. That is, she thought being in love with a man like him would change everything for the better. Deep down, she knew he couldn’t marry her, even if he loved her – and he didn’t. Professor White needs lady friends to make him feel better. He isn’t looking for love. He isn’t even looking for... you know.”

“He sounds like a strange fellow. I suppose there is a reason for it?” Ethel smiled, and said,

“Now, sir, I can’t say anything against him. He has always treated me right. Liz likes him, too! We are twins – not exact twins

– but born together. She is more serious, but still likes to dance. Both of us know better than to fall in love... at least, if we can help it. But as of late, I think Liz is slipping. She and the professor are going out together – just the two of them.” Tate asked,

“Do you think that Emma was somebody else? I mean, do you think Emma Gales was not her real name? Usually, when somebody dies, we can find their folks.” Ethel considered the question for about a half-minute while softly tapping out a rhythm on the table. Then she said,

“Remember what I said the other day? I think her name was Polly. Now, that doesn’t mean much. My sister’s first name is Lavinia, but she goes by her middle name Elizabeth – or Liz. If I were stuck with an old fashion name, I would take my middle name if it was better. Polly is definitely an old lady name.”

“What else do you know about Pete?”

“Word has it around the Horse Pond that he snatched the college girl! Her name was Alice.” Sheriff Tate was taken aback.”

“When did this happen? Were there any witnesses?” Ethel shook her head, and said,

“Pete is the *bogeyman* of the Horse Pond. Every time somebody down there disappears, they say Pete took them. It was the same when they found Emma’s grave was empty: they said Pete took her. I don’t believe it. It was somebody that wanted her buried in a decent grave – family, I suppose.”

“Tell me more about this college girl.”

“I think she was some type of missionary of sorts – not exactly, because she would take a drink from time to time; and she wasn’t preaching. She would do things like pass out booklets on ‘woman things’ like keeping your baby healthy and having a clean house. Sometime, she would take them to the doctor – she had her own automobile! Some liked her, and some called her a busybody. When Emma caught the flu, she tried to take her to the doctor. Mrs. Huffman told Alice that she would nurse Emma; and then, she told Alice to get out of her house or she would call the police.

Alice was gone for a while. When she came back, that's when she disappeared for good. It is all talk; if anybody saw something, they wouldn't admit it." Tate said,

"This helps me a lot, Ethel. Now, let me ask you something while it is on my mind. It appears to me that up until now, you avoided talking frankly with me. Why is that, Miss Rouse?" Somewhat embarrassed, she answered,

"I know the places where they have liquor parties. The girls thought you were coming to arrest me... funny; you did."

Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. Before the magistrate is gone for the day, I am going to make arrangements to get you out of here. You'll still have to see the judge sometime down the road, but nothing much will come of it. What might work better for you is helping me figure out what is afoot in the Horse Pond. All you have to do is keep your eyes and ears open. I'll stop in on you now and then; and we'll have a little chat. Let me know what you decide. Meanwhile, I don't see any reason to keep you cooped up in a cell. Why not come along with me while I get you out of this fix?" Ethel brightened at the prospects of being relieved of a weekend of boredom. She joked,

"Does that mean that I'll be in your custody?" The sheriff laughed, and said,

"Yes, by all means...unless you prefer spending the afternoon in a cell? I might take my time coming back."

On the drive over to the magistrate's office, Ethel chatted and demonstrated her singing ability. Within an hour, she was free again to enjoy the rest of the weekend. Even so, she promised Sheriff Tate that she would keep out of speakeasies... so, she did. Furthermore, she decided to forego any further association with Herb Peterson.

Julia moved into William's house the day of their marriage. It was a spacious home befitting to his status at the college, but not

particularly ostentatious. It had all the modern conveniences, and its décor was subdued – not overbearing as was the case with many of the late-Victorian houses. Inside and out, it was as the previous owner left it, including most of the furnishings. William did not change anything. It was a liquidation situation that proved favorable: a fully furnished family house for a reasonable price in a neighborhood mainly populated by his colleagues. Unlike most bachelors, he kept his home neat and orderly. Once in the spring and again in the fall, he hired a lady to give it a thorough cleaning and airing out; but avoided hiring domestics. As a child and young adult, he had performed the necessary daily chores for himself, and the habit was ingrained. As for cooking, he did the least he could because he did not like washing pots and pans. Marriage brought about changes in the menu. Julia was shocked to discover no lard, butter, flour, sugar, and spices – except for pepper – in the cupboard. Her husband boiled his eggs, made cold sandwiches, and ate vegetables raw. He behaved at home like preparing food was some irksome task. At the school, he devoured the offerings of the dining hall. Generally, when somebody else was doing the cooking, he enjoyed meals. Eating the food from the dining hall was not something Julia relished, nor did she have the time to prepare all the meals at home. William hire a cook named Dora, and she was given a weekly menu for every meal with detailed instructions. The recipes were written in a notebook.

Dora liked William, and called him “Doctor.” He was generally easygoing and ate anything put in from of him. It was always wonderful, and he told her so in charming statements of gratitude. Julia, however, was a picky eater. Sometimes, she complained halfway into a meal that her appetite was gone. At this point, William stopped eating. He was raised to consider it impolite to continue eating if the other person at the table had had enough. To continue was tantamount to saying that you cared more about the food than the person across from you. Adding to the problem, Julia talk continuously from the moment she sat down at the table. It was not banal chatter. He had to think about his response to everything she said; thus, his progress through the meal became ponderously slow. During the middle of the night, he woke up

hungry, and raided the ice box. Dora knew this, and felt sorry for him. She thought the “Doctor” had married a crazy woman. On this particular Saturday, Julia gave her cause to believe that assessment was on the mark. When Julia reached down to pick up the morning paper from the porch step, she screamed,

“White! It’s White!” Stumbling on the threshold of the door as she ran inside, she barely recovered her footing. Dashing into the dining room, she waved the *Messenger* on high saying, “Good Lord, William! It’s White!”

At the end of the dining room table, William stared at her, dumbstruck and bug-eyed. Standing over him, Dora displayed a similar expression, the links of sausages on the platter she was holding rolled off onto the floor. When William regained his composure, he asked,

“What are you talking about?” Julia answered,

“Look at this picture on the front page! It’s White!” She handed the newspaper to William, and sat down in the chair beside him. He studied the photograph, and read the article carefully. Handing the paper back to Julia, he said,

“Dr. White published a book about the colonial history of Gilridge. It hardly seems like a front page story. Either the news is thin to day, or he paid them.” Julia balled up her fists, and trembled. She was on the verge of having a conniption. Suddenly, she cried out angrily,

“No-no-no, this can’t be! He used Clara’s notes!” William asked,

“What notes?”

“You just glanced at that article, William! I told you to read it! He acknowledged ‘his protégée, the late Clara Armistead, for her contributions to the work’. What contributions? I’ll tell you! Everything that I wanted her to find when I sent her on those trips to the state archives! Jane and Andrew gave that scoundrel everything she was working on before she died. Good Lord,

William! He turned around and harvested it for his own book!” Julia suddenly fell silent. She placed her hand on her brow, and said,

William... I feel light-headed.” He said,

“Calm yourself... Take a deep breath.” Before William could say another word, Julia stumbled. He rose from his chair and tried to steady her. Placing her hand on the table, she slumped into the chair at the end. After a moment, she grasped the arms of the chair and straightened. Looking directly into William’s eyes, she said,

“White wasn’t satisfied with taking away my classes... Now, this! ... No! I don’t want to think about it a single moment longer. Sit down, William...Eat your oatmeal.” She covered her eyes with both hands. William looked at Dora, and asked,

“Oatmeal?” Dora placed the platter down on the table.

“Doctor, all but one of your little sausages fell on the floor. Do you two want to divvy this one up, while I cook up another batch?”

March 15, 1921. The minute Ethel saw Sheriff Tate enter the freight office with Joshua Coleman, the company attorney for the railroad, she wanted to make a quick dash to the nearest hiding place. No sooner had she stood up from her desk, Tate said,

“Come on over here, Ethel. We need your assistance.” Forcing her frown into a smile; and then in a tone of disingenuous sweetness, she asked,

“How can I help you, Sheriff?” He replied,

“If we can go into Mr. Hines’ office, I will be more than happy to tell you.” Once out of sight and earshot, Tate said, “This morning, there was a letter on my desk. I suppose it came with yesterday’s mail.” He produced from his coat pocket an envelope of the type used to send greeting cards. “Nice, isn’t it?” Holding it up to his nose, Tate said, “It smells like lilac perfume. There’s no

return address. From the postmark, I can see it was mail from Richmond, Virginia on Saturday.” Ethel grinned, and said,

“Oh, Sheriff, you have a secret admirer! Who do you think she is?”

“I don’t know, Ethel; but maybe, just maybe, you do.” He removed from the envelope a card embossed with a floral design. Tate read its contents to Ethel.

“Listen to this: ‘Dear Sheriff Tate: Emma Gales gave the enclose key to me for safekeeping. After learning that an effort to have her remains reinterred in a proper grave revealed the unthinkable, I was persuaded by conscious to send you the key. I do not know what it unlocks. Please tell Ethel Rouse to stop asking questions about Emma around the Horse Pond; and if she values her life, she must never go spying in the speakeasies! Beware of Pete. Sincerely yours, Miss A’. What are you up to, Ethel? I know that I asked you to watch and listen around the Horse Pond, but it looks like you have been at it for a while. Asking the wrong questions in certain places can get you in big trouble. So, you have been playing detective?” Ethel looked away, and tapped her fingers on Mr. Hines’ desk. Finally, she grumbled,

“Yes, Sheriff Tate; I’ve been at it since they discovered her grave empty.”

“Well, so have I... Who is Miss A?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you know anything about this key? I sure do not know what it opens. It’s certainly not for a safety deposit box, or post office box.” Ethel interjected,

“That’s easy enough. There is a number stamped on it. Any locksmith in town could help you with that. Offhand, it looks like the key to a desk or cabinet.” Tate looked at the key closely, then said,

“I think you're right... This is where she spent most of her time. Do you suppose it goes to anything in here, Miss Rouse?”

Handing the key to Ethel, he said, "After all, there are quite a few places to hide something here." Ethel studied the key, then said,

"I haven't seen this one before. You'll have to check with our locksmith over in the machine shop. He keeps a record of all the keys." Sheriff Tate asked Mr. Hines,

"Can you spare Miss Rouse for a while?" Ethel said,

"Not again, sir! My mind is still spinning from last time!" Tate said,

"You're going to accompany us over to the shops to find the locksmith. After that, we're going over to Mr. Coleman's office and have a little chat." Ethel groaned,

"Am I in your custody again, sheriff?"

"No... but... Will you just come with us? If it takes more than an hour, I'll buy you a sandwich." Ethel smiled, and said,

"Alright, that sounds good to me."

The locksmith identified the key as one belonging to one of the old-fashioned desks that the company used back in the 1880s. They were fashioned by a local cabinetmaker, and fitted with unique lock sets, each with a different key. According to his records, all the desks and the keys were accounted for, except one. It was in the inventory, but wasn't assigned to anybody. The last person to use it, signed for the keys in 1896. They were never returned. Paging through his records, he found that the gentleman signed for keys for a new-style desk in 1902, and returned those in 1916. The old desk had to be somewhere. The locksmith, along with Sheriff Tate and Mr. Coleman, began a thorough search of every building at the depot, including the administration building, the records office, machine shops, the freight warehouses, the office in the marshaling yards, and the switching tower. Ethel tagged along, uncertain as to whether she was needed. As the morning wore on, her mind turned to the sandwich she had been promised. When the party returned to the stationmaster's office, unsuccessful in their quest, Ethel interjected,

"Sheriff Tate, there's one place you didn't check. If you go to the end of the hall on the third floor in the office building, you'll find a door. Behind it, there are stairs that lead to the attic." The locksmith said,

"There's nothing up there. Besides, that door is locked." Ethel corrected him.

"No, it's not! There are boxes and boxes, old papers and all sorts of junk up there. Occasionally, Mr. Hines sends one of us there to add another box." Looking at the sheriff, the locksmith said,

"Well, it was supposed to be locked! Who knows what's up there now?" They returned inside the administration building and climbed the grand staircase to the third floor. Upon opening the unlocked door at the end of the hall, the locksmith grumbled,

"Look at this! There are boxes on the steps going up to the attic! Who has been doing this young lady?" Ethel said,

"As long as I've worked here, anything that doesn't go to the records office is put into the attic. It's mostly old publications, letters, advertisements, things that get broken, things that people leave behind in the waiting rooms, and there is some furniture, too."

Carefully making their way up the steps, Ethel and the gentlemen entered the vast attic. Except for a maze of paths crisscrossing the space, it was filled with boxes and miscellaneous items. Mr. Coleman picked up an envelope in the top of an open box. Removing the letter, he found it was dated December 20, 1908. Chuckling, he said,

"It looks like this has been going on for some time." The locksmith then spied a desk with boxes piled on top of it. He exclaimed,

"There it is, Sheriff!" Gingerly, Tate inserted the key into the lock on the lid. It turned freely. Bringing down the lid cautiously to

level, he could see a ladies cloth handbag. With a pencil, he removed it cautiously by the strap. Ethel, excited, asked,

“Why are you doing that? Just open it!” Mr. Coleman interjected,

“Hold on, Sheriff! At that moment, Tate pressed the point of the pencil between the clasp that held the purse closed, and it opened. Probing inside with the pencil, he could see a stack of bills and a clear glass bottle with a cap. After working the bottle out onto the desktop, he pulled back. Coleman said, “Stop right there! We need to have a talk with the president of the company.” Tate said,

“Coroner Wilson needs to take a look at this.” Coleman turned to the locksmith, and said,

“Lock the door behind us, and post a watchman to guard it while we are gone. Also, tell our detective to meet us in the president’s office.” Ethel asked,

“What is it?” Coleman told her

“Go back to your office and busy yourself until we send for you.”

Coroner Wilson joined the assembly in the president’s office, then all proceeded to the attic. On seeing the object inside the bottle, he calmed said,

“That looks like the middle phalange of an index finger.”

Nearly two hours passed before Sheriff Tate returned to the freight office. Ethel had to have her sandwich! She insisted,

“Make good on your promise, Sheriff! I’m about to fall over!” Tate groaned, and shook his head. Without saying a word, he turned away from the counter in the freight office, and headed for the door. On turning the knob, he said,

“Come on, Ethel. I’m taking you into custody... for lunch.” Ethel haphazardly put on her hat and coat; then rushed out the door after the sheriff. Halfway across the street, she caught up with him. Then, she sprinted eagerly the remainder of the way – through

the doors of the dining hall of the Railroad Hotel, and up to the cash register. By the time Tate came up behind Ethel, she was placing her order.

“I want two fried egg and bacon sandwiches with pimentos and horseradish on toasted buttered bread.” Tate said,

“Make four, and let’s have some sweet lemonade, too. While you’re at it, give the lady a piece of chocolate cake. She’s worked up a fearsome appetite helping me this morning.” Ethel remarked,

“Yes, I did! The sheriff thinks poor-little-me can run around following him and his friends up-and-down-and-all-around creation on an empty stomach indefinitely.” After the cashier left for the kitchen with the order, she said,

“I told you Emma saved her money!” Tate remarked,

“Yes, you did. Now, tell me why she hid it a desk in the attic of the railroad administrative building rather than a bank? After clarifying that, you might want to explain the finger bone in the bottle.”

March 28, 1921. When the mail arrived shortly after noon that Monday, Jane Armistead was sitting on the front steps to their house staring off into the budding trees. Since the shocking outcome of her well-intentioned philanthropic act – and the scandalous hubbub that followed – she had gradually grown emotionally numb; and the sedative the doctor prescribed to help her sleep made it difficult to concentrate. So, she would sit for hours, thinking of nothing. When the mailman greeted her, she looked up and smiled. He handed her a package. She thanked him, and placed it at her side, then continued her mindless contemplation of the trees. The package contained Dr. White’s new book. Clara received gratuitous praise in the acknowledgements for her so called contributions. When she tired of looking at trees, she returned inside, took a few more pills, and when to her bedroom.

When Andrew arrived home from work, he found the package on the porch. He picked it up and took it into the house. Before he could open it, he had to prepare dinner. The housekeeper quit at

the beginning of the month; and Jane was no longer able to prepare a meal without cutting or burning herself in the process. Her mental deterioration accelerated rapidly during the month, but Andrew felt that with the coming of spring weather, she was improving. He was wrong.

When he found Jane, she was unconscious and her breathing was shallow. Over the course of the day, she had emptied her bottle of pills, likely taking one after another without realizing it. By the time the doctor and ambulance arrived, her breaths were becoming weak and far between. On the way to the hospital, her breathing seemed to improve. Even so, the doctors saved her just in time. Had a half-hour longer passed without help, she could have died.

At about a quarter of eight that evening, Dr. Polk brought the news to the Powell's doorstep. He told Julia that Jane Armistead had taken ill suddenly and was in the hospital, but she was recovering rapidly. Then, he insisted that William walk with him. After they strolled halfway down the block, he told William,

"Earlier today, I saw her sitting on the porch gazing off into space. After trying to converse with her, she merely smiled at me and nodded her head. Today, tragedy almost visited the Armistead household twice in so many years. They nearly didn't get her to the hospital in time – too many pills." Startled, William asked,

"Was she trying to take her own life?"

"No, William, it was accidental... At least, I hope so." After walking in silence for a few minutes, he said,

"I heard that you plan to take a sabbatical this summer to work on your research. Is that so?"

"Yes, Dr. Polk... but there is more to it. I am worried about Julia. She is devastated by White's latest cruelty; in newspaper vernacular, one might say he 'scooped' her. Julia needs an entirely new world. This place is grinding her down; and I am afraid she is going down the same path as Jane."

CHAPTER THREE

April 4, 1921. Since their marriage, William had taken great interest in making his house more pleasing for his wife. During their first month together, he purchased a piano. From that point forward, she began seriously reviving her long-neglected keyboard technique. After dinner, Julia sat down at the piano to practice the manual parts to Bach organ works. This evening she was practicing the fugue from the *Prelude and Fugue in E minor* – the so-called “Wedge Fugue.” William was seated in the room, drinking coffee. Midway into the opening measures of the fugue, she stopped suddenly, and exclaimed,

“Good Lord!” She turned back to the keyboard and launched into the fugue at tempo, speaking while playing, she said,

“Clara arrived on Wednesday. She spoke with me on Thursday. On Sunday, she hugged me when she thought we were engaged. She fell ill that afternoon. The girl from the depot caught it at the same time, and both died at about the same time, early Tuesday morning. There were five cases reported on campus before us. The memorial service was on Saturday. I was ailing on Sunday. You were laid up on Monday.”

“Julia, that does not make sense.” She stopped playing. After a moment, she returned to the fugue subject, played it through slowly, then said,

“No, it doesn’t.” She stood up, closed the book of music, and folded her arms. William said,

“Clara didn’t leave the house after she saw us on Thursday. That is, not until church. Mr. Armistead told me.” Julia sat down on the piano bench facing William, then asked,

“It appeared on campus at the same time as it did in town. That is what Dr. Bates said in his report.”

"I don't know. I don't remember. Julia, what made you bring this up again?"

"I don't think Clara was infected on Thursday. She must have been exposed Friday, or Saturday – maybe, not to a person with the disease. The germ could have been on a piece of paper, or something. No, it had to be Saturday..." William leaned towards her, resting his hands on the walking stick he used to steady himself. He said,

"Clara was dead four days – embalmed, too!"

"Maybe, Dr. White or somebody else at the funeral gave it to us. Perhaps, they gave it to me, and then I gave it to you... I am so sorry, William, if that is true."

"It would not matter, Julia. Influenza was on campus and in the town before we came down with it."

"Did you have the sick students in your classes?"

"No... But there is nobody to blame. It was chance, Julia... merely, chance."

"Of course, it was chance, but the pattern means something. The question that I am asking is this: How did it spread so fast across town? Why did it pass by neighborhoods so near to where it raged? Then, it appeared from nowhere at a distance?" William pondered her questions for a moment, then said,

"Dr. Bates recorded the confirmed cases meticulously. Further, he predicted it would come here with the soldiers from the camp. I suppose that is a good starting point. If you wanted to expand on his findings, how would you go about it?"

"I would begin with the death certificates in the office of the Register of Deeds; then find out where everybody was living using a city directory. It should be easy. After that, I would find out how these individuals are connected – their routines, and what would bring them together. It might be a publishable study."

"Do you want me to help?"

Yes! This is what I am thinking: the epidemic jumped from the depot to the college, from the depot to the Southside, and from the Southside to the mill village: step by step, in contrary motion. So, it appears. It didn't jump, William! Somebody moved it – relocation to distant points." William thought about this for a moment, then said,

"There were no reported cases before Emma Gales and Clara, and the first started showing up after the weekend. Dr. Bates double checked, and published it in his final report."

"So, William, you are curious, too?"

"How can I not be? It changed our lives!"

"No, it didn't; just asked Dr. Polk. It changed the world – or at least, what we thought the world was – but it did not change us! We are the same. Regardless, I cannot get one thing out of my mind. If Clara was infected on Thursday, she would have given it to me. After your pistons splattered grease in my face, she took her a handkerchief from her sleeve and gave it to me to wipe my cheek. She was close enough to my face that I felt her breath. Then she fixed my hair. For some reason I can't explain, I felt ill at ease because she was too close. When the tips of her fingers touched my neck, my whole body tightened in reflex as if something were about to strike me. But that was a week before I was sick! William, I should not tell you any of this, but... no, it does not mean anything. I will say this: if she had it on Thursday, I would have had it within two days, or not long after. It wasn't her. Now, where did she get it? What about Miss Gales? Dr. Bates didn't answer those questions."

"Did you not like Clara?"

"No, William! That is not what I am saying! There was somebody she met Thursday. Her parents didn't know or suspect, or maybe wouldn't admit. Nevertheless, that person infected her!" William dropped his walking stick on the floor, then mumbled,

“So, you think that fellow infected Miss Gales and Clara?”

“Calm down, William. It’s not syphilis.”

“Then, who infected us?”

“Saturday after she died, Sunday, Monday... I was sick Sunday afternoon. It seemed to be coming on in church. Likely, I gave it to you after walking me home – when in the doorway of Mrs. Phelps’ house, I stole a kiss. I am so sorry for that, William.”

“Don’t think such a thing! We were infected at the same time during the funeral – Thursday. Dr. White took ill that afternoon. We talked with him at length. Clara’s death crushed him...”

“Yes, William. He was in love with her. However, she didn’t give it to him, and certainly not the other way around. It was stepwise; somebody gave it to the two young ladies late Thursday or Friday of the week prior. Then that person recovered, or left town for whatever reason; Dr. Bates missed this one. Then somebody took it from the railroad district to the college. The Friday after Clara died, the Yeats girl – her name was Millie – was the first to catch it on campus. Rudy Mallard was ill that afternoon, but died before Millie. I had both in class that Wednesday. That is why I remember. There was another boy.”

“Milton Pratt. I had him in class. Nice boy, too. He and Miss Yeats were engaged. They were opposites. Millie was loud and funny, full of too much energy. Milton was relaxed and studious. When the two were together, it reminded me of a hummingbird darting between the blossoms of a fruit tree. It is sad we’ll never know how that would have turned out.”

“There were four that Friday.”

“Let me think, Julia... A young lady... She survived, but withdrew during the spring term and never returned. I don’t remember her name... she was one of your students. Oh, yes, it was Alice... Alice Cowan – the girl that went home without telling anybody.”

“That must have been later... much later. I don’t remember her. Sick on Friday implies infected on Wednesday if the pattern holds true, two to three days. Dr. Bates thought it took two days at most. There is another link, or several.”

“Julia, I will help you with this inquiry. Yet, I sense there is something more than academic curiosity behind your motives. You almost died. Sometimes, when I venture up to the attic, I forget your coffin is there. It makes my heart sink to look at it. Knowing you persist in your intent to be buried in that particular coffin gives it a terrible quality that I cannot put into words. I am aware that it is a point of honor for you even though Mrs. Phelps never intended for you to make such a pledge. So, please tell me. Why do you want to retrace this path? Do you feel responsible for Clara’s death because you sent her to the state archives, or do you entertain guilt for surviving?” Julia bent down, picked up the walking stick, and placed it in William’s hand. She returned to the bench, and then placed her hands over her eyes. After a moment, she took a deep breath, and looked at William directly with a sad smile. Julia said,

“When Clara told me how alone she felt, she compared it to the settlers who hid behind that palisade each night... fearful of the wild... knowing that they might never return home, or see loved ones again. I thought I understood, but I didn’t. When she told me she was leaving, then... all was clear, but... don’t ask me. I am not ready to tell you. Please don’t ask me... I feel terrible for not understanding, or telling her that I would try. Now, I must find out – not only for her, but for all of them – what happened. Is it really as Dr. Polk thinks? All their promise, their virtue, their bravery, is of no consequence. It is all chance, from birth to the grave. If we learn something from their deaths, we might help others when it comes again. That is good, but it's not enough...” Tears started trickling down her cheeks. On seeing her distress, William assured her,

“You don’t need to explain. I will help you...”

Julia was not being honest with herself, or William. She felt guilty for having sent her to the state archives knowing that influenza had been reported in several towns along the way. Then there was the disagreement that had taken place between them earlier. She had said hurtful things to Clara that she was ashamed to think about. All seemed to have been resolved... Then, why was Clara leaving school? Julia could not endure not knowing. She needed proof positive that Clara's blood was on her hands, or it was the product of her perceived guilt for having survived.

June 2, 1921. Julia wilted in the stuffy confines of the archive at the office of the register of deeds. The only window in the room was painted shut. The janitor tried to pry it open for her, but ceased his efforts when a crack developed in one of the panes. The Deputy Register, Mr. McKay, gave her a bamboo fan to cool herself, but it only provided temporary relief. At no time in public, would she unbutton her sleeves – she never wore blouses with open sleeves. This time she opened them and the high buttoned collar as well. Beads of sweat rolled off her brow, and dripped on the lenses of her spectacles. Even if she had dressed in the current fashion, the degree of relief would have been negligible. Heat was her most feared enemy! Since her teens, she had suffered from uncontrollable perspiration, a disorder called hyperhidrosis. When the temperature rose above the mid-sixties, the sweat started to pour. So embarrassed was she by this condition that she abandoned her music career. She forwent socials, except during the cool months; she never attended a dance; and before William, she avoided courtship: all of this for the fear of 'turning messy' in public. Making things worse, the warm weather caused her to wear thick, dark clothing, thus compounding her misery. This day, regardless of the discomfort, she pressed on with her research.

Before her, there was a metal box much like a safety deposit box from a bank vault. It contained the 1918 death certificates. The period from the beginning of September through the end of November covered the epidemic months. Julia entered all the information on each death certificate in a note pad. While she

worked, William was spending the afternoon in the public library transcribing obituaries for the same months from archived copies of the *Messenger*. This collection included issues that had never been distributed due to the lack of newsboys during the epidemic, and the one-page lists of the dead. In analyzing their weekly finds, William placed a large map of Gilridge on the table in the library of their spacious home. On Saturday evenings after supper, they mapped out the information they collected in their respective research. Points were assigned to the residence, place of employment, and place of death for each victim. The first deaths, as was expected, were in the railroad district. This cohort included clerks from the railroad office, warehouse workers, and various individuals employed in neighborhood businesses. Not one was older than thirty-four years old. Most were in their twenties. They resided in the Railroad Hotel, the apartments over the Walnut Cafe, or in boarding houses on the nearby streets. The waiters at the restaurant died, as well as the ticket taker at the picture show across from the depot. Emma was the only woman in the first railroad district cohort. She lived in Mrs. Huffman's boarding house with other women of her age. There were no men or couples living there, nor were men allowed to enter. Gentlemen callers had to conduct their socializing on the porch. Lady-visitors were allowed. Julia puzzled over Emma's death certificate. It was only partially filled in. Setting it aside on the table, she returned to studying the others.

Mr. McKay brought Julia a glass and a pitcher of water. Usually, nothing of the sort was allowed in the archive, but he was afraid she would faint. It was the hottest day of the year to date, and the humidity made it feel worse. Julia's bun unwound, and her hair cascaded down her back. The pencil felt slippery in her hand, and perspiration stained the pages of her notebook. At three-thirty, as the afternoon sun was bathing downtown in its brutal glare, Julia finished her entries, stood up from the table, and collapsed on the floor. Mr. McKay and two clerks carried her into an office and placed her in a leather chair. Propping up her feet, they placed wet

washcloths from the janitor's closet on her face to cool her. After a minute, she opened her eyes. McKay said,

"Stay still, Mrs. Powell. I think we need to telephone your husband. Is he at the college today?"

"No, sir. He is in the public library..." Mr. McKay sent a clerk running across the square to the library. Julia mumbled,

"Forgive me, Mr. McKay. In the past, I've never fainted from the heat." He replied,

"It is ninety-six degrees outside; at least, that is what our thermometer tells us. It is not much cooler in here. You shouldn't do anything like this to yourself, no matter how important it might be. I was afraid this was going to happen!"

"Could you fetch my notes? I must not leave them, certainly after making such a scene. Once again, please forgive me..."

When William arrived, Julia was sitting in the chair with a wet wash rag draped over her head. Her arms hung limp at her sides. The notebook rested in her lap. Before William could say a word, she said,

"What did you find?" Mr. McKay pulled another chair beside Julia, and William sat down. He lifted her, and said,

"You're shaking! Do you want me to call a doctor?" She mumbled,

"No, William... When you start that automobile that I told you we didn't need, bring it around to the front. These kind gentlemen offered to help me out. In a minute! Now, tell me what you found." William shook his head, and answered,

"A photograph. The 1912 yearbook for the high school has a picture of Clara and this Emma Gales together – just the two of them. They were reciting Shakespeare's Sonnets, all one hundred and fifty-four from memory." Julia immediately tried to stand, but became lightheaded. She fell back into the chair. She spoke in a thin voice,

“I’m sorry, William... I was wrong about the automobile. We need it. Please take me home, undress me, and put me in a cool bath.”

“Julia, you can’t say that here!” Suddenly, her eyes opened wide. Looking at Mr. McKay, she said,

“Please don’t repeat what I said. It’s the heat on my brain!”

“Julia, do not say any more. I’m taking you home, and then we will send for the doctor.”

A woozy Julia, clutching her notebook, was ushered into William’s automobile by Mr. McKay and his clerks. They were very apologetic about what had happened to her. Amusingly, she had forgotten about the wash rag draped over her head. As soon as her mind cleared, she snatched it off. William was strong enough to carry her into the house, but his unsteadiness made it difficult. He held her around the waist with one arm while steadying his steps with the walking stick. The weakness Julia felt in her knees made it difficult for William to get her through the doorway. He didn’t attempt to take her upstairs. Carefully, he placed her on the couch, and called the doctor.

Julia’s health was not as robust as it had been before her struggle with influenza and pneumonia. Nevertheless, the doctor found she had a heart murmur. He was of the opinion that she likely had it from birth, and under normal situations, might not present any problems. Whether influenza had complicated the underlying condition, he could not say. Admitting that from youth she had perspired heavily with little exertion, even when the temperature was moderate, Julia added that as late she was experiencing spells of dizziness – feeling as though she would faint on rare occasions, and she was short of breath during those times. Julia found the doctor’s recommendation crushing: she needed to remove to a dry, cool climate during the summer months, abandoning any thoughts of teaching summer courses; and she needed to avoid undue physical exertion and emotional stress.

Now, the pronouncement was official: both husband and wife were infirmed in body, at forty-six and forty respectively.

William had by this time been relegated to administrative duties and two graduate-level courses. He could not give lectures looking up at a corner of the ceiling reading his mental notes. The natural flow from mind to voice was interrupted. It took him an excessively long time to answer student's questions because he had to visualize his answers as written text. The volume of his writing, however, increased dramatically. He had published several significant papers since the epidemic concerning sediment deposition in coastal waterways. He was also working on a textbook on fluvial form. As a result, the college wanted to keep him on in a reduced capacity. The library employed Julia in the fall and spring terms only, and then from noon until five. Student assistants did most of the work, and there was little else for her to do. This was the dismal reality of her coming years. In June of 1921, William was anxious to attend to his wife's health. After a week of planning, he decided to take her to the Northwest.

June 21, 1921. As their train traveled away from the humid East, Julia started to feel better. Having never seen the landscape beyond the Appalachians, she found the view from their car fascinating. However, a significant change in her thinking occurred when their train stopped in St. Cloud, Minnesota. Julia told William that it would suit her fine if they never returned to Gilridge. There were too many memories there that she would prefer to forget. William asked her where she would rather live. She answered,

"I suppose we will find a place - maybe, not on this trip, but perhaps the next. I am not sure how well the cold winters will treat me, but my mind is at ease now. Certainly, with every mile removed from our old world, I feel more at ease." He replied,

"I'm glad. Whatever you decide; you will find me in agreement. I don't want to go back. I am tired of people looking at me and whispering 'Poor fellow; he is spent.' There is nothing wrong with my mind."

“Why should any of that matter? If you were far away in a mountain cabin writing your books, nobody would have a chance to judge you. Deprive them of their assumed right to know you. Stand apart on a high mountain daring the little minds to climb with you.” Surprised, William said,

“Have you turned Romantic poet on me?” She smiled, then said,

“Not yet, but I would like to be up there on that mountain, too.”

After evening approached, Julia watched a thunderstorm form, in the distance, as their train traveled north. She expected it to roll over at any minute, but it was actually further away than it appeared. Well after nightfall, the path of the storm and the train finally intersected. The lightning was so intense that distinct shapes on the horizon were visible for a split second. The claps of thunder reverberated through the cars, rattling everything not bolted down. The dramatic display was brief. The rain that followed was nothing more than a light shower. William dozed off with his forehead resting on the top of his hand, which in turn held the broad brass knob of his walking stick. His left hand was planted flat on his knee. Julia nodded off, her head propped against his shoulder.

August 3, 1921. Julia and William found their summer spot in Missoula, Montana. Situated in a valley that contained two beautiful rivers, the Bitterroot and Clark Fork, the town was approximately 3,200 feet above sea level. It proved a healthier place for the couple. While there, they inquired about possible sites in the region where they could build a home, but ended up putting off the decision. Julia took up fishing. She developed an appetite for sunfish. Within a few weeks, her health improved dramatically. In a dark skirt she had made from a thick material found in a local dry goods shop, and a comfortable pair of lady's boots for walking, she was well-prepared for daily outings. A modified unstarched men's dress shirt served for a blouse, and the ridiculous hair bow she

wore to secure her bun was put aside. Julia was starting to look rustic.

William enjoyed the outdoor life also, and was not hampered by lack stamina. He merely had to avoid losing his balance. With Julia, he took measurements of stream flow velocities in the network of creeks feeding into the rivers, collected sediment samples, and took hundreds of photographs hoping a handful might be useful for his textbook. In the evening, Julia and William enjoyed long conversations about fluvial geomorphology; a field of study that rekindled Julia's interest in mathematics, another potential sidetrack. Delighting in analytical thinking, she began taking part in the field measurements with the same enthusiasm she had shown with the carillon restoration.

By the beginning of August, both started to feel uneasy about having to return to Gilridge. They were not required to be on campus before the twenty-sixth of the month, but would have to begin making their way back east in a few weeks. The "cottage," as William called the cramped rustic dwelling, they rented, was beginning to feel like home. Julia had acquired a fondness for a particularly ugly Victorian chaise lounge in which she enjoyed "relaxing in an unladylike state" – her terminology for being loosely buttoned. Admittedly, William was relieved to see his wife had relinquished the burden of perpetual formality. Her obsession with being perceived as "messy" shaped her self-image. In actuality, nobody who knew her thought anything of the sort – rather the opposite. In concealing her embarrassing debility, she struck people as being a "tight-laced" Victorian throwback. During their stay in Missoula, William saw rigidity transformed into relaxed eccentricity – likely its predictable direction. The confidence that she was acquiring simply by feeling good was encouraging her to regain the independent spirit he admired. Julia was bold, self-reliant, and occasionally a scold before the most-recent revelations about her health. He wanted these qualities restored. While Julia was lounging, William read her the letter of resignation that he planned to send to the college. She immediately sat up and said,

“You will not resign because of me. Even though the letter says nothing of the sort, I can read the subtext. By the time we return, the weather will be trending mild, so I will be fine. Further, beloved husband, I am going to learn how to drive that automobile, so should the situation ever arise where something happens to you, I can take you to the doctor.” Seeing the return of her familiar attributes, he asked,

“After all the fishing and hiking, do you really want to collect dust in the company of old books for the next nine months?” Julia sat on the edge of the chaise lounge, and said,

“No! There is the work we left unfinished...” William looked at his letter, and then slowly tore it in half. Julia continued, “I enjoy being a part of your work, and it gives me the greatest satisfaction – believe me, I regret having not taken up the study in the first place. Nevertheless, there is something to what I started, too.” William dropped the two halves of the letter on the floor, and said,

“A tobacco broker named Calhoun was the first death on the east side of the city. His office was on River Street. Except for an apartment building called ‘Riverview,’ no cases of the flu were reported on Second and Third streets south of the downtown commercial district. All the victims had several things in common: they worked in offices near the railroad depot, and they were in their twenties and thirties. Furthermore, most were single males. That is where we left off with the map. Let me have some hypotheses.” She replied without hesitation,

“The two restaurants and the moving picture theater are the mixing bowls. Emma Gales worked with five young ladies in a poorly ventilated office. Two were infected in late October after the quarantine, and three remained healthy throughout the epidemic.” William pondered her answer, then asked,

“So, let me give you my thoughts. Emma Gales got off work in the railroad office on Friday, met her high school friend Clara. They had a meal together, and then went to the picture show. A few soldiers from the camp in town on leave or in transit were

there. The soldiers ate, watched the show, or both, and then took the morning train. The source of the infection was gone. That is how the two ladies caught the germ. Just being in the same building might have done it. That seems plausible.” Julia, animated, exclaimed,

“That is exactly what I think! It came from the soldiers. Miss Gales did not infect the ladies in her office because it was a weekend. A student, or several, went to the theater the next weekend, and then brought influenza back with them to the college. There is a gap where there should have been cases reported. The infection was given a second chance, and that time it caught. Though we have not returned to our research since my little spell in the Register of Deeds, I think you will find that neighborhoods with an older population such as that south of the commercial district were untouched. The old do not congregate together or live with each other in cramped quarters like young people – boarding houses, apartments, cheap hotels, picture shows, saloons, billiard halls, brothels, cafés, dormitories, and cafeterias.” William took a large, heavy envelope from his desktop, and handed it to her. Reluctantly, she opened it, and then gasped. Placing his hand on his forehead, William said,

“The photographer from the *Messenger*, Mr. Churchill, takes the photographs for the high school annual. This is a print made from the negative. It is very clear, much better than the book. You will recognize one of the young ladies; the other is Emma Gales.” Julia interjected,

“She was pretty, very pretty. I imagined her differently...” William asked,

“I assume you mean Emma since we know Clara was pretty.” Julia said,

“No. Clara was beautiful. There is a difference... Good Lord!” She put her hand to her mouth. William asked,

“What do you see?” She said,

“It's nothing, William. It doesn't mean a thing. Just young girls, that's all.” William continued,

“I wonder why Emma resided in a boarding house. Her parents live on Mulberry, the section that begins on the opposite side of campus – not a poor section in the least. Their daughter won quite a few honors in school – she was very studious. So, why didn't she go to college? What was there to be gained by working in the railroad office with the less affluent girls? I'd say they disowned her. I'm not trying to be cruel. You are determined to force open closed doors, and I can tell before you try that whatever you find is going to cause trouble. Could you endure that? Then, there are those two...” Julia mumbled,

“When I looked at this picture... William, if you found this, so will the others!”

“What others? What do you see in that picture that escaped my attention? Two schoolgirls posing on the steps of the school holding hands – that's all I see! Where is the secret?” Julia placed the photograph in the envelope, and then handed it back to William. After reclining and staring up at the ceiling for several minutes, she asked,

“How old was Clara when you purchased the house on Mulberry?”

“That was in 1905. I guess she was about ten years old, or thereabouts.” Julia continued,

“For all that time, she lived across the street, growing up before your eyes, is there anything you can say about her that would be any different than Reverend Smallwood's eulogy?” William pondered her question deeply for a moment, then said,

“She was very empathetic in an exceptional way. If you felt unhappy or unwell, it appeared as though she felt it too – almost like a type of sharing. She sat on the steps and talked; rather, she started the conversation, and then listened. Never in all the years, did she behave in a childish way, at least not in public view. There

were no children her age in the neighborhood, so she sought company from the professors. I don't know about her school friends. They never came for a visit." Julia asked,

"No school friends?"

"I don't know, Julia. I remember various things, not everything. She like dramatic readings: from their porch, Dr. Polk, his wife, read the plays of Shakespeare aloud with Clara when she was in her teens. What struck me about this was the power behind Clara's recitations – it was like listening to a seasoned actress in her prime! Sometimes, it was frightening! I was ill-prepared to hear the voice of Cleopatra speaking through this soft-spoken, sweet, young lady. Other parts, even male leads, she delivered with convincing maturity that obviously life had yet to provide her the opportunity to know. By my reckoning, it seems likely that she studied the actions and emotions of adults and mimicked them in her recitations. On the other hand, there were two times that I recall when I saw her in a state of distress. The first time, she was about the age when that picture was taken. She sat on her steps and cried off and on for an hour. I asked what was wrong, and she said, 'Someone tore my heart out! It was all deliberate and cruel! I did nothing wrong! Nothing, sir!' and then she ran into the house." The last time, it was the same in many respects. One month before she died, she sat on her steps and cried. Before I could ask her what had happened, she ran inside." Julia placed her hands over her eyes, and said,

"It was my fault, William. She was completely crushed, and I didn't think she would ever return... she did, and we acted like nothing had happened. The second time she tried to tell me about how she felt; I listened – acting the part of confident. She saw through it, and respectfully withdrew cordially... I tore her heart out, too. The next day, I suppose she was desperate for solace, so she went to her friend." Julia turned over on her side, facing away from William. After taking a deep breath, she said,

"I suppose I sent two young women to their deaths unintentionally with an insincere gesture. Perhaps, all of us – even children – have committed this transgression against humanity, but

go about our lives in blissful ignorance of how we became accidental killers. Certainly, our victims make it so easy through the foolish decisions they make that ultimately bring them to the precipice – all it takes is a push or a jostle. I will have to live with the knowledge of having been an executioner from a distance; and having crippled you with a kiss.” William removed the photograph from the envelope and studied it carefully. Spotting something, he removed a magnifying glass from his field satchel. After his examination, he placed the photograph on the table face down. In a somewhat aggravated voice, he said,

“Our life together will not be consumed by your regrets, nor will you labor to unearth the real or imagined crimes of others. I am not crippled, you are not a killer, and there is nothing out of the ordinary in this photograph. You are my wife, and the commitment you made to assume that role supersedes whatever obligations you feel to the dead. I need you more than they could. Furthermore, I want you to find another place to store that coffin. In its present position, it is located above our bedroom. I will not deny you the right to keep it, but it will not remain in our house.” Julia turned to face William. Tearfully, she said,

“My astonished reply was, ‘What are you doing? I am not your mother, so kindly refrain from familiar gestures!’ Then, I walked away in a huff. Surely, my dismissal hurt her to the quick, but she was brave about not showing it. That was about a month before she died, so it fits with what you witnessed. Her gesture was very sweet, but out of place... I did not stop to listen to her. That is what makes it so disturbing to me. She was possessed by a fearful type of loneliness.” William took hold of his walking stick, and made his way to the chaise lounge. He sat down, and sighed,

“Words and nothing more... There is nothing proof-positive in what you are assuming. Her gesture could have been motivated by something you did not see – something innocent. Perhaps, she sensed you were feeling some hurt? Have you thought of that? Regardless, if it is as you said, let her take her secret to the grave. For the sake of her family, do not mention this again. Don’t even

think about it! Pick up your old research, and drop this. As soon as it is possible, we will be back here and spend our days in the Bitterroot Mountains.”

The fall of 1921 was pleasant for William and Julia. The influenza research was packed away, and the couple became engrossed in assembling the textbook. Julia drew all the diagrams and charts. She proofed William’s text. At the college, her position in Special Collections proved to be far more interesting than she imagined. There, she returned to her earlier interest in the colonial history of the region. The collection had letters, journals, and maps that she had never seen before. Nearly all of it was poorly inventoried and catalogued. In her work, Julia discovered a letter from a group of Charleston merchants to the Collector of the Ports, Mr. Maxwell. The merchants were mounting an independent inquiry into the disappearance of the Gilridge settlers. The letter sought verification of a rumor that there had been an outbreak of smallpox. A list of individuals who left Charleston to take up lots in the town was included. While the box of correspondences did not contain additional letters concerning the inquiry, the signatories of the Charleston committee provided her with possible strings to follow. There might be something in the archives at Saint George. She sent a letter to find out.

Clara’s earlier find, a letter from the daughter of the colonial governor, supported the rumor of an outbreak of smallpox. Julia suspected it was true. The diary of a shipbuilder named Porter, written fifty years later, mentions the site of a burying ground “on a wooded hillside above the boundary street.” In the 1780s, the town would have ended on Third Street. The old church cemetery was three blocks south, and the public cemetery was beyond that another three blocks. Slaves and free persons of color were buried in a cemetery on the northern boundary. The earliest map of the town was drawn by a British naval officer in 1761. All the other cemeteries appeared on this map, except the burying ground mentioned by Porter. The “wooded hill” was occupied by town lots by 1818, and the boundary street was pushed two blocks further.

The entire hill ran the length of three blocks, so there was no way to pinpoint a specific site for this burying ground using Porter's description. Still, the thought that the settlers from Charleston had died of smallpox, and then buried on this hill, intrigued Julia. It also reminded her of the frightening hallucinations that she had during her struggle with the flu. They had been stripped of everything, even their identity, and thrown into a mass grave? The more she entertained thoughts of a past tragedy; the parallels to recent events entangled her.

November 5, 1921. Julia learned how to drive the automobile quickly, but turning the crank exhausted her. She could do it, but usually asked a student for help. William enjoyed riding, looking at the landscape as it passed by, so Julia became his driver. She liked this arrangement; it gave her a chance to explore. When the weather started to cool, driving around town became routine. She spent hours out and about on Saturdays while William enjoyed long naps on the couch. Ultimately, her lingering obsessions compelled her to visit Clara's grave. Since her interment, her parents placed a beautiful marble statue a serene young girl clutching a bouquet of lilies at the head of the grave. The inscription on the granite pedestal was simple, but heart wrenching, "Rest knowing that our love for you endures." In the urn at the foot of the slab that had been placed over the vault were fresh flowers.

Julia wandered through the cemetery trying in vain to find the grave of Emma Gales. Instead, she found the mass grave that was created during the height of the epidemic. Stone markers traced out the location of the trench. A massive stone monolith listing the names of the victims with the dates of their birth and death was placed center behind the plot. The row of urns spaced between the markers and the monolith were filled with cut flowers of all varieties. When Julia visited the office of the caretaker to inquire about the location of Emma's grave, she discovered that Emma's name was not in the registry. Then her attention was directed to an ancient leather-bound volume with the word "INDIGENT"

stamped in black on its cover. Paging through its contents, she found the earliest entries dating back to 1865. All the entries contained a number before the name.

The Potters Field was an annex of the county cemetery, but a high brick wall prevented access to it. The entrance gate was at the end of a dirt road near the railroad tracks. As Julia negotiated the brambles and sand spurs that thrived on the path to the gate, she was overwhelmed by the degree to which dishonor had been heaped upon this young woman. Upon entering the walled enclosure, her heart sank: at least ten acres of numbered concrete markers tightly spaced in the sand stood before her. There was no discernable path through the graves.

When she found Emma's marker, she noticed that her grave had sunk. The crude pine box used for paupers must have collapsed on her remains. On seeing this, Julia's knees gave way, and she crumpled into the sand. Besides the grave, she sobbed uncontrollably. Emma had not merely been disowned in life; she was excommunicated from familial affection, as though she had never been born. Julia dragged herself to her feet, and brushed the sand from her skirt. Her return to the cemetery for decent folks was punctuated by prolonged periods of weeping that did not end until she had exhausted her emotions to the point of numbness. Upon returning to the caretaker's office, she encountered Dr. White, her former chairman – the same that demanded her replacement. Their encounter was initially uneasy, but Julia told him that her position in Special Collections was the right place for her, given her condition. By this time, however, she was healthier than she had been before the epidemic – and she knew it. The summer trip west was the tonic, and she was craving to return. Smugly, White told her that he was glad his decision to dismiss her worked to her advantage. She smiled, and contemplated a clever way of inflicting pain on this arrogant prig. He asked,

“What brings you here, Mrs. Powell? I hope it is not on account of a friend.” Adeptly lying, she replied,

“Nothing of the sort, sir. I am planning to have copies made of the cemetery register for Special Collections. The records go back to 1853, you know. It might prove to be an asset for researchers, don’t you think?” He laughed and said,

“Still laboring over minutia? History, dear lady, is about great individuals who move the indolent masses forward to a better existence. The lives of ordinary men and women end here, and there is no need to unearth them. So what if you compile dossiers on all the merchants and planters who settled nearby. Like their counterparts today, they pursued self-interest religiously, shaping politics and morals to fit their purpose. Outside of this place, they are unknown.” Julia interjected,

“Very good. Now, what brings you here?” She knew that he had come to put flowers on Clara’s grave, but preferred the diversion of listening to more of his foolishness.

Dr. White was thirty-two years old, handsome in a boyish way, and given to spouting erudite sounding nonsense designed to attract a following, particularly the young. He was just the sort to fall hopelessly in love with beautiful young ladies, and too narcissistic to realize he was being used by them. Conversely, mature and worldly women of his own age and slightly older took delight in trying to seduce him for affect. Julia wanted to despise him, but could not hate a man who was blind to the ruinous trajectory that his life was taking.

Under White’s direction, Clara had been working on her thesis. Julia had seen it and knew that it was about two-thirds complete before her death. It was a fairly lengthy work at that point. Her topic was Jacksonian politics and economic policies and their influence upon internal improvements in the state. White vowed to bring it to a conclusion, publish it, and have the school award her degree posthumously. The first two elements of his program were doable, though not entirely honest, but the college could not award the degree – even posthumously – because the thesis was not finished. If White was merely defending it, he might have

succeeded. He kept trying for the latter until the end of the year. The college refused to consider the matter thereafter.

Clara, unlike nearly all the ladies in White's life, did not use him, nor did she encourage his affections. She did not even know about his infatuation. His adolescent mind manufactured it during the week she died. Contracting influenza and nearly dying, he attributed his survival to her intervention from beyond the grave. Like Julia's hallucinations about being buried alive, the illusion of saintly Clara saving his life persisted in his dreams. Ironically, his efforts to finish her work coupled with his devotion to her memory led Clara's parents to share their daughter's writings with White in an effort to aid his quest. Her *oeuvre* was stupendous for her youth! Over the space of her last three years, she had written two volumes of poetry – all very painful, passionate, and publishable.

"Dr. White, could you help me start the automobile? The crank gives me such difficulty."

"Certainly, Mrs. Powell. Before we part, I would like to share something glorious with you. Within the boxes of Clara's writings that her parents so kindly shared with me, there are volumes of poems – beautiful sonnets about love and loneliness that will make you cry. Can you believe it? I had no idea! She was the most diligent scholar, true, but a poet? I intend to publish it all without the slightest edit at my own expense. Jane and Andrew Armistead have given their blessing!"

"Love poems, you say?" Julia was aghast to learn that Clara had written love poems. All she could think about was degraded and forgotten Emma. Now, the fool was going to appropriate the artifacts of Clara's love life into his public delusion. Not edit? How could he resist?" Julia said,

"Splendid, sir! How fortunate that her works fell into your hands, and were not lost amidst the wreckage of her tragically short life." White puzzled at the wording of her statement, then said,

“Wreckage is a harsh word, Mrs. Powell. Certainly, she spread a pure love on her way through this brutal world?”

“That is true, Dr. White. I didn’t mean ‘wreckage’ in the sense that she intentionally brought damage to herself and others. She had a pure heart, and that caused her grief.”

“How do you know such things, Mrs. Powell? Did she share her inner thoughts with you while she was your assistant?” Julia could see the pathetic look in his eyes when he asked, and abandoned her intention to prompt the self-styled champion of a dead woman to reflect on the hopelessness of his cause. She said,

“My husband knew her since she was a child, and can testify to the fact that our Clara was pure hearted by nature. As the hymn goes, ‘Weak is the effort of my heart, and cold my warmest thoughts,’ that is, if I were put in the balance next to Clara. Aside from that, tell me, have you any idea where you contracted the flu? It was obvious that you had it when Clara was put to rest. I’m sure you recall when I felt your cheeks and forehead and said, ‘Good Lord, you are burning up!’ You could hardly speak. I suppose it was your throat, was it?” He answered nervously,

“I recall... It came on quickly, in an instant. I collapsed in my drive after the funeral. A neighbor took me to the hospital, and that is all I remember. Surely, you are not accusing me of giving it to you, madam?”

“It does not matter if you did, sir. I gave it to my husband with a kiss. He will deny it, but I know in my heart it is true. It was a goodbye kiss – I knew for certain I had been given a death sentence. That is how we are different from Clara. She would have forgone the satisfaction of a final goodbye for our sake. Feel free to tell me, we are fellow malefactors, where were you on the Thursday before the funeral?”

“Let us see how sincere you are about these confessions. I can reinstate you as a lecturer in the department next term. Would you have that, or my confession?”

“Why, your confession... You were entertaining a young lady downtown.”

“If you knew, why ask? The satisfaction of hearing it from my mouth when we lack a living witness must be disappointing. I am a womanizer in the same way some men are drunks.” Julia laughed slightly, and smiled,

“It is not a matter of satisfaction, nor do I fault you for your lack of propriety. There is a gap in the progress of the infection, and it appears that you fall somewhere in it. You see, my interest in things scientific was rekindled when I married Dr. Powell. He has been doing great things. Now, the desire to see the world as complex interconnected systems is more meaningful to me than the ramblings of philosophers that happen to be popular with industrialists, if you like. I want to know where you were doing your entertaining because I suspect soldiers from the camp introduced the infection. Does that make you feel at ease?” Reluctantly, he asked,

“Will you give me your word of honor that you will not spread this around?” On hearing this, she could not suppress her laughter. She placed her hand on his cheek and said,

“You, sir, have mistreated me in a callous way, but it is trifling compared to the wrongs that I might have committed. You have my word of honor. However, everybody knows what you do.” Irritated, he gently removed her hand from his face, rotated it, and then placed her fingers over her lips.

“Keep quiet, just the same, and don’t laugh at me... I went to the café in the Railroad Hotel alone for dinner. The food is not that good, but the Horse Pond girls from the boarding houses frequent it, particularly when there are soldiers in town. That night, the soldiers were in town waiting for the northbound morning train; you are correct on that point. I invited a young lady to join me for dinner. I don’t recall her name.” Amazed, Julia interjected,

“You don’t remember her name?” He continued,

“Mrs. Powell, as you well know, the Horse Pond is a working-class neighborhood, and their ways are different from our ways. They are honest, good stock, but not given to the ambition or highest aspiration of the species. The young females not attached to households are happy to join your table if you have the means to provide food and drink for the evening. It is a convivial but a transitory arrangement that provides the satisfaction of mutual needs.” She interrupts again,

“You are a lonely man. I think you do less womanizing than has been reported. You want a lady to listen to you without anticipation of a display of intellectual virtuosity. Am I right?”

“In a sense, you are correct on that point, too. I don’t want to spend my time with a lady like you, if you pardon my candidness. You have ambition and aspiration in abundance, and that means you cannot help but challenge me at every opportunity – as you did! That is what you are doing now.” In her own defense, she replied,

“My husband doesn’t think so!”

“Your husband thrives on challenges! Do you want to hear the rest of my story, or would you prefer heaping on more humiliation?”

“I’m contrite, if you like, Dr. White; actually, remorseful is more accurate, for calling you an arrogant prig, a poseur, a despotic dandy, and a windbag.” White continued,

“After dinner, I took her to the motion picture theater next door. Then, I walked her back to her boarding house. She gave me hugs and a kiss on the porch before going inside. I did not use her in any way! I have never used any of them! I’ll have you know that some have used me from time to time, but I can forgive them. Dandy, you say? My mother was a Horse Pond girl in a town you’ve never heard of, and my father was a hard-working, honest man who knew how to invest his money. They are a world apart from a highborn lady such as you, but they are pure of heart. By your own admission, you are not. ‘Weak is the effort of my heart’ is

dead on! You and your kind have made me into an intellectual snob. Now, if you have had enough sport at my expense, I will be happy to crank your automobile.” Julia, who had been recovering from her experience in the Potters Field by jousting with her nemesis, was dealt another heavy blow. Dr. White was not the person she thought he was. She asked,

“Please, Dr. White, one thing more.”

“No, Mrs. Powell! You are horrible!” Julia covered her face with her hands, then asked,

“Were you in love with Clara because she had a pure heart?”

“Yes, Mrs. Powell! She had a pure heart! You hurt her!” Julia dropped her hands from her face, and stared at him in disbelief. He continued, “As chairman of her thesis committee, I met with her quite often. About a month before her death, she broke down in tears in my office. When I asked her what was wrong, she said you had said something to her – she refused to say what! However, she told me that it meant nothing. Then she said, ‘I am nothing,’ mumbling it over and again. I took her outside for a walk, and my assistant brought her coffee. She calmed down after a while, and said that she wanted to go home. Once more, I asked her, what had happened to her? She said, ‘It’s not her fault. I did it to myself. I thought she would understand, but she was deeply offended! Now, it is too late!’ After walking a few minutes without responding to my questions, she said, ‘It’s all over; I know it. I hope she marries, I pray she will never lose him.’ That sounds like Clara fell in love with a man twice her age, doesn’t it? She had most of her life to nurture her feelings. He lived across the street, and she always spoke of him in the most admiring terms.” Julia gasped. Dr. White then drove home his spear. “Then you came along, and won his affections. I can’t say that I approve of the difference of age, but Clara was a grown woman of great intelligence that matched Dr. Powell in that very important respect. Everybody knows that she had no interest in the shallow young fellows!” Julia screamed out in horror,

“No! I did not take him away from her!”

“You didn’t? Of course, you did. Don’t you think it was unseemly to get your way in such an aggressive fashion? In broad daylight, you made a pretty scene for your neighbors on Mulberry Avenue. You pushed him down in the street, and then demanded that he marry you. Even a lowbrow such as me knows that is not ladylike!” Julia felt lightheaded. It happened at the moment when the enemy had her cornered! She was going to pass out! As she started to sink, she grasped for anything solid; it was no use. Consciousness slipped away. She had the sensation of floating, then all when black.

Dr. White picked her up and loaded her into the back seat of the automobile and drove her home. She regained her senses to find her husband, and the so-called fool that defeated her, were removing her from the seat. White said,

“She is overexerting herself, Dr. Powell! By the looks of it, I think she collapsed twice. Her skirt picked up sand spurs. Likely, she was in the woods out by the railroad blocks away.”

“Let’s get her into the house. I’m calling her doctor right away.” Julia struggled to her feet and shook aside the men holding her arms. Defiantly, she pronounced,

“I do not need a doctor! True, I overexerted myself and had a spell, but it passed.” Dr. White said,

“If it had happened while she was driving, she would have crashed. You should not give her free reign to come and go unaccompanied. Obviously, she does not appreciate the severity of her condition.” Julia retorted,

“It is just a murmur, sir! More commonplace than you might think! Like the rest, I thought you were a fool. You play that part so you can become the puppet-master! Don’t listen to what he has to say, William! He is a conniver that wants you to oversee my movements, I tell you. He doesn’t want me making any more discoveries!” Julia started tilting toward William. He caught her arm, and said,

“That’s enough, Julia. I know the two of you have your differences, but need I remind you that this gentleman pulled you helplessly from the ground and rushed you home. You are an obsessed individual who makes light of her promises not to meddle in bygone affairs that do not concern us. Do you take pleasure in making scenes that jeopardize your reputation and position? I can see that bringing you back here was a mistake, but now I am committed until May.” White took her other arm, and said,

“Sir, let’s get her inside. There is something I must tell you out of earshot of your nosey neighbors.”

They took Julia inside, and sat her down on the couch. Then White commenced his final offensive,

“It is not my intention to interject strife into your marriage. Even so, I am obliged to intervene when there is no other way of preventing your wife from doing self-inflicted physical and mental harm. Mrs. Powell was drawn to the cemetery against her better judgement because she cannot let go of her guilt obsessions with the decease Clara Armistead.” Julia exploded,

“No! You will not!” White continued, despite her protests.

“Miss Armistead was infatuated with you, Dr. Powell. It was a longstanding affection that she kept to herself. This is, until she confessed her feelings to Julia. Your wife-to-be abused her so brutally, that she came running to me. My assistant witnessed the whole heartrending description of Julia’s jealous tirade. Needless to say, Clara was inconsolably crushed and humiliated, but managed to find the noble fragments of her pure heart and preceded in the spirit of goodwill in her association with the both of you. During the month that followed this incident, we became close friends. I must admit; it was improper of me to encourage it.” Julia growled,

“You slanderer! It didn’t happen that way!” White tightened his lips and shook his head,

“Who is to say what happened. She died a month later. Why not give us your side of the story?” Julia immediately fell silent. William placed his hand on her shoulder, and said,

“You are going to get yourself in trouble.” He turned to Dr. White and asked, “In spite of all the turmoil you have visited upon my house today; I must thank you for rescuing my wife. If she promises to sit still and compose herself, can I drive you back to the cemetery?” He replied,

“I’ll make my way back on foot. It is only three and a half blocks – the exercise will give me the opportunity to clear my mind.” White excused himself. Dr. Powell fixed his wife a tonic of aromatic spirits of ammonia and soda. After taking a hardy gulp of the concoction, Julia fell back in the sofa and covered her eyes. William unwilling to press the issue further, returned to his chair. After remaining silent for a half-hour, she said,

“White made up that nonsense. Clara wanted us to be together... She and Mrs. Phelps conspired to engineer our engagement. I was jealous of her... a little – but, it was a sisterly jealousy that was inseparably mixed with abiding affection. I should have kept my distance – that’s shameful to say, but I could not help being drawn to her pure heart! She was brilliant and beautiful... and perfect. Her family loved her. They didn’t treat her like an inconvenience, shipping her off to school so their play would not be interrupted by an interloper...” William replied,

“Let her go, Julia. You have other problems to worry about. White is trying to lure you into wrecking your career and your reputation. I am uncertain of his motives, but he knows how to attack where you are weakest. You need to stay clear of him at all times, particularly in public. When you are on campus, go directly to the library and stay put until it is time to come home. I will meet you there. Do not come to the quad, and wait for me. He can see you from his office. That will deprive him of the opportunity to stir something up. That said; we need to discuss your health. Clearly, if these fainting spells come over you when the weather is mild and you have not unduly exerted yourself, there is more to the problem than we have been led to believe. By the looks of you, I can tell it happened more than once today. There are sandspurs on your

dress. That means you fell somewhere other than the cemetery this morning.” Julia answered,

“I was in the Potters Field behind the main cemetery. Emma Gales is buried there... It was heartbreaking! That is what worked me up before I encountered White, but it didn’t cause me to pass out. It was all the horrible things he said... I don’t know what to do.”

“We will see the doctor. Maybe, he can prescribe something for these spells.”

“I want to find out why Miss Gales was disowned.”

“Drink the rest of your tonic, Julia. I have something to show you.” Seeing the serious look upon William’s face, she quickly downed her tonic. William produced from his briefcase a card stock folder containing several newspaper articles from the *Messenger*. Handing it to Julia, he said,

“I borrowed these clippings from the librarian at the public library. She cuts articles out of the paper every day, organizes them into categories – businesses, churches, schools, and individuals – and then, files them in these heavy folders. So reluctant was she to lend it to me for a few days, I had to leave my gold pocket watch as security. As you can see, Emma Gales, whose family lives on the wealthy east end of Mulberry, was a volunteer nurse who died in France before the epidemic. She was buried there, not here. Furthermore, as you can see, she attended a private women’s college in the middle of the state between 1914 and 1916. The article praises her altruism for having curtailed her studies so she could aid the war effort. After training, she was sent to France in August, 1917. Gales is a common name in the region – going back to the founding of the town, no less. Emma is a popular name, too. So, the woman buried in Potters Field is a different Emma Gales.” Julia closed the folder, and placed it in her lap. After brushing several brown leaves from her hair, she sighed, then said,

“That explains the missing information on her death certificate. I was wrong. There was no connection between her and

Clara. Still, I feel sorry for her.” William shook his head, then grumbled,

“You are not the only one who felt sorry. Jane and Andrew created a considerable stir when they tried to have her remains moved. The grave turned out to be empty! It was a big story earlier this year. How did we miss that?”

“What?”

“Yes... likely, it added to Jane’s difficulties. Be careful! Continue your research on the epidemic – no prying, or making a nuisance of yourself. Do not loiter around the cemetery; particularly, since White is inclined to visit. There is something wrong with that man. It is more than simple meanness.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Dr. White did something that Friday night that he had successfully avoided for years. He stayed the night downtown with the twins, Ethel and Liz. Now, it was daylight and he was stuck in their flat over a business. It would be impossible to make a getaway before dark. The twins were spent. Ethel having flopped on the couch with one leg off; and Liz, sleeping curled up like a house cat on the rug. Both danced and chatted the night away while sipping from a milk bottle filled with moonshine. White had declined the alcohol mixed with whatever foul and poisonous substance, but he enjoyed holding the girls close as the crackly phonograph records played their muffled tunes. The more they drank, the closer they clung to him. Of the two, Ethel was the sweetest. She liked to have her hair stroked during the slow dance. Liz, by contrast, was bolder. Throwing her arms around his neck, her eyes never left his during the dance. As the night wore on and liquor took effect, she turned from gazing to a sustained kiss. Then, her lips fell away, and she crumpled to the floor slowly – her hands slipping down him as she descended. Seeing her blissfully slumbering, he draped his coat over her shoulders. After turning out the light, he settled into the armchair, and propped his feet on the ottoman.

Daylight came quickly. Turning his face away from the window, he closed his eyes. In the silence of the room, he heard the soft, eerie sound of the ladies breathing. The occasional thump of the radiator interrupted their purring. The atmosphere of their parlor was permeated with the aroma of perfume, and powder layered over a background of something more mysterious – it made him uneasy.

There was a world of difference between the Clara that haunted his mind and the Liz that overpowered his senses. The so-called ladies' man was secretly afraid to be drawn into the intoxication of intimacy. Still, the two flesh and blood women within arm's length, looking like piles of draperies carelessly tossed

in storage, actually cared about him. Equally, both trusted him to such an extent that they could sleep peacefully in their inebriation knowing he would protect them. Had they thought otherwise, he would not be there.

As light filled the room, White began to feel like he was trapped in the chair. Unwilling to wake the ladies, he impatiently waited for one to return to consciousness. Finally, by the time the street below came to life, Ethel rolled off the couch, and stumbled across the room shielding her eyes from the daylight streaming in through the window. Upon reaching White's chair, she teetered while trying to form her words, then toppled forward onto him. Holding on, she whispered,

"Could you help me up? I need to make breakfast." Smiling at him for a moment, her eyelids closed and gradually, her head descended onto his chest. Slowly, White lifted Ethel and walked her to the kitchen. There, he sat the half-conscious, disheveled beauty in a chair and set about preparing breakfast for the twins.

With her head resting on the table, Ethel watched White working at the stove. Soon, he placed a cup of steaming coffee before her with a sugar bowl and cup of milk. Inhaling the aroma of the strong brew, she said,

"Thank you, Professor. I'm sorry it's taking me so long to get moving. I would, if I could, but I can't... not right this minute." White chuckled and said,

"Stay still, Ethel! I'll fix the breakfast. It looks like it will be fried eggs, and... it appears that there's nothing else in the icebox." Ethel frowned, and said,

"She forgot. I'll have to go to the grocery before lunch. Do you have any money?" White reached into his wallet and pulled out a ten-dollar bill. Placing it on the table, he said,

"There. That ought to feed all of us well for a while. It looks like you two darlings kept me from my safe escape. Now, I'll have to sneak out in the wee hours." Taking the bill from the table, Ethel replied with embarrassment,

"I'm sorry... we were having such a good time. Did Liz fall asleep on the floor?"

"Yes, she did... I didn't want to move her." Ethel smiled, then asked,

"Did you try to make love to her?"

"No, Ethel! What makes you think such nonsense?"

"Before I passed out, I thought I spied her kissing you... I think she wants to... and if she doesn't, I do." White, startled, turned from his cooking, and asked,

"What?" Ethel laughed softly, rose unsteadily from her chair, and then started to set the table. After a few minutes of silence, she said,

"We both like you, and... as of late, it looks like the other girls don't interest you anymore. You come downtown to see us." White returned to his cooking as Ethel continued, "We are good for you."

"Yes, you are. Do you want to know why? It is simple. Since the war, I have been thinking about this thing called 'society.' Not just high-class society, but all of it. From the moment you are old enough to understand, the whole congress of petty tyrants that stand atop this heap of manure called the civilized world impose their plan upon you. Everything you do, or not do, is part of their design to trick you into keeping their class fat, happy, and in control. Do you know about the Indians who lived here long ago?" Ethel stopped setting the table, and eagerly said,

"No. Please tell me about them!" White spoke as he scraped the eggs from the skillet into the plates on the table.

"The Indians lived here for thousands of years. They did plant, but didn't divide the land into this or that person's farm; they didn't build great cathedrals or monuments; and they didn't have schools, banks, factories, or even, clocks to divide up their days." Liz appeared in the doorway, holding her head. She leaned against the frame of the door and listened to White.

“They didn’t dig up the mountains looking for gold, and they didn’t cut down the forests to build cities. After thousands of years! – Just out there on the river bank – they didn’t leave a mess behind to let you know they were there. Then the settlers from New England came with cattle, axes, and guns. The settlers bargained with the Indians for a strip of land by the river. Their king agreed to share the land with the newcomers – he didn’t understand the concept of private property. Then one of the settlers came up with a plan to make more money. He told the chief that a ship was coming, and it could take the young men of his tribe away to be educated in useful skills. It was a trick. The young men were sold into slavery! But of course, it seemed a good idea to the New Englanders. Their type of Christianity didn’t apply to savages. To make a long story short, the day came when the king demanded that the young men return home. After waiting over two years more, he enlisted the aid of men from the local villages to drive off the settlers’ cattle and destroy their town. They took the wives and children of the settlers to replace the lost youths sold into slavery, and drove the men to the mouth of the river to do their best, or starve. They were fortunate that a passing ship saw their signal fires and picked them up. That was in 1660. It would be more than a half-century before the English attempted a second settlement. That, ladies, is Gilridge.” Liz mumbled,

“I forgot to go to the grocery.” Ethel said,

“That’s an exciting story! What happen next?” White shook his head, then continued,

“The English came back with their ‘civilization,’ drove off the Indians, brought in African slaves, organized a government to protect property holders, and introduced all the bad things that had worked so well in Europe. What does that have to do with the three of us?” Liz answered,

“Not much to us two. They don’t pay us to think.”

“That’s right, ladies; and thinking will not make you happy. You find all sorts of unpleasantness that you didn’t know existed, like the Indians. If anybody tells you that an education will make

you happier, don't believe them. So, let me tell you why I like both of you above all the rest. You help me forget how unhappy I am, and nothing will change that."

After their breakfast, Ethel and Liz went to the grocery while White napped on the couch. His story about the settlement of Gilridge fascinated his lady friends, yet having an eager audience didn't really explain why he had selected them as his special two. If the truth be known, he didn't have any friends – not friends whom he could trust. The twins, in spite of their naivety and shallowness, were honest. They lived from hand to mouth thinking of carefree weekends on the town. As long as their minds were uncorrupted by the intellectual junk of the educated class, they would remain protected – rather, he would remain safe. To marry one, though tempting and too easy, would require a complete retooling of his life. He would have to become his father! All his ambivalent notions about greater culture would have to be abandoned to become an unapologetic profiteer. How would Ethel or Liz behave when exposed to the infection of almighty capital?

His mother, all the bit as affectionate and light-hearted, was transformed into an incoherent lush by the abundance resulting from the financial genius of his father. Alcohol became her life. From morning to night, she sipped away her days – not in dance, but as though it was her job. The most mundane of tasks was impossibility without a drink, and certainly anything considered enjoyable became unbearable torment without her poison. The volume and strength of her daily diet – for she hardly ate more than a nibble – would send two hulking longshoremen to the floor! At age 43, she drowned in her bath while his father played a solitary game of billiards, competing against himself. Would this be the fate the professor would hand one of the twins?

While White pondered the handiwork of his demons, the twins spent a joyous time at the grocery store stocking up on provisions. On their return trip, they had to walk three blocks loaded with their favorite goodies. Halfway home, they had to put down their boxes and rest. Ethel asked,

“Do you really think the Professor is unhappy?” Liz grinned and answered,

“He’s unhappy, alright... among other things: handsome, smart, generous, and a real gentleman. I feel like he cares about me.” Ethel interjected,

“Me, too! I think he cares about both of us..., but I am afraid it can’t last much longer.”

“Why not?”

“He’s afraid to fall in love, and... we’re pushing him. You know; it can’t be both of us. When it happens; it will be good-bye, and both of us will be sad for a long time.” Liz picked up her box, and told Ethel,

“We’ll not think about that until the time comes – ‘live for today,’ as they say.”

“Who are they?”

“I don’t know; but if folks repeat it, there must be some truth to the saying. It wouldn’t surprise me if he didn’t fall in love with you.” Ethel laughed, and said,

“You’re prettier!”

“I am not. We are twins. Maybe, not identical twins, but close enough in looks. If I wasn’t taller, who would know the difference? Besides, pretty doesn’t matter. You’re a sweetheart, and I am a little bold. You’re so sweet that the sheriff let you go when he raided the speakeasy. If it were me, things would have been different.”

“That’s true, Liz! You’re a ‘vixen.’ That’s what the old ladies whisper. ‘Keep your boys away from her,’ they say. Really, it’s not true.” Looking forward, Liz replied,

“I know it’s not true. But if some people decide something is true, then it is true. That is what the professor said with all his fancy words and stories. I can say it better. One day, back a long time ago, there was a woman who followed her own mind. The folks that ran the show and had everything didn’t want that spreading, so they called her a vixen; and then the rest would

mistake her for a streetwalker or a witch. If you page through some of the books the professor has in his automobile, you'll see for yourself. A king named Henry didn't stand a minute for a wife who followed her own mind – he had six of them, one after another. From what I gather, he took an ax to every last one of them. See, it doesn't do you any good to be pretty or a good dancer if you're too smart for your own good." Ethel asked,

"Do you think the Professor is too smart for his own good?"

"No. He's smart in a lot of ways, but not smart enough for his own good. You know what I mean."

The twins made it back to the rear of the decrepit old brick shop, and struggled up the narrow iron steps three flights with their haul of treats. From the landing, they could see through the long alley White's Packard *Twin Six* parked on Second Street. Liz lamented their reluctance to learn how to drive. Ethel told her,

"The time will come, sister. We've always lived over somebody's shop on this street, like our parents and grandparents. When we forget we grew up here, walked to school with the Horse Pond girls, and worked for the railroad like every family of our line back before the War Between the States, then we'll drive. It will be us together!" Liz sighed, and said,

"No, it will be you. I like where I am."

The twins prepared lunch for White while he slept uncomfortably on the couch. The frilly embroidered cushions were a poor substitute for a soft, deep pillow. Like the room, it was scented with flowers and womankind, a perpetual reminder that White was not where he should be.

By the afternoon, the twins commenced their chattering, and White was finally called to lunch. The radiator thumped and clanged; the tinny phonograph played the same insipid dance music, and the ladies feasted on cookies, soda pop, and sardines. Come supper time, when the sun had set, White was served sausages, canned peas, and turnips. They had changed into their

evening's best for the closing festivities – their hair neatly set; their makeup flawlessly applied. The evening entertainment included dancing, sitting on the couch, and eating chocolate bars. White did most of the talking, and the ladies listened attentively. They wanted to know more about the Indians, so he gave them a lecture on the Tuscarora Wars. After one last dance, White left the beautiful twins and disappeared into the night as his admirers watched from their landing. It was ten o'clock. The frigid evening breezed channeled down the alley, and chilled the lovely duo. Liz said softly,

“I hope he falls in love with you.”

November 14, 1921. At the end of August, and the beginning of May, every window in the men's dormitory was open. Usually, “the fellows” boarded two to a room; but occasionally, a third was added to the crowd if enrollment was heavy. The nights were miserable during the hot, humid weeks; few could sleep comfortably. Restless youths went into the parlor, threw open the front and rear doors, and tried to doze off in the comfortable furnishings that the room afforded. The breeze that passed through the building was refreshing, but it took a while to get used to the noise from the railroad marshaling yard a quarter-mile away.

The male graduate student stayed in an old Stick-built house on the hill above the men's dormitory. At three stories, it accommodated on average twenty-five men of varying ages, and it retained the feeling of a family house. Still, its residents were as miserable during the hot weather weeks as their undergraduate counterparts. The Grove, with its lake and stone paved paths, separated the noisy environs of trains and the fellows from the central avenue that ran through the campus. Traditionally, the campus men claimed the Grove as their playground. Even though the garden existed for the mutual enjoyment of all, young ladies that ventured over were considered bold. After the first frost, few lingered long under its majestic oaks, or walked the stone pathways, or placed a blanket on the lawn to enjoy a picnic. It was merely a cut-through from the center of campus to the men's dormitories.

Julia, unlike the rest, enjoyed walking out to the Grove – particularly after her banishment to Special Collections. The campus had forgotten she was a professor – they didn’t even recognize her! She was the “pretty librarian.” Since childhood, she had been called “pretty,” but didn’t like it. Her mother told her that her looks were “far from extraordinary,” and “pleasing enough for a dark haired girl, but no great beauty.” Her mother had a head of thick, luxurious, flaxen hair like Mrs. Phelps once had, and she was called “an actual beauty” by many. Julia always looked the part of a librarian with her delicate gold frame glasses and bun that constantly was trying to unwind. Ironically, now she was “the pretty librarian.” Was it her expensive dresses, her shoes, her hats – she detested hats – or was it the façade of sweetness that she had thrown up? Julia was a woman of forty, not a “sweet thing.” A few years earlier, she had climbed up the carillon tower like the boys, getting grease sprayed in her face. Her powerful, full voice reverberated in the lecture hall. How did it all change so quickly? Maybe, it was always there. Her father was a sweet man with a generous spirit – and dark hair. He was affectionate and caring; and secretly, so was she, Julia thought; therefore, she had inherited these qualities from her father. However, there were qualities she had that were definitely not attributes of her father’s character, and she liked some of them! There were also qualities of her father that she did not want.

Julia closed Special Collections at four-thirty, and proceeded down the stairs to wait for William. She had told him that morning that she wanted to take a walk to the Grove since the temperature had risen into the sixties. It was a cloudless day with a deep-blue sky. The first day in a week that was not frigid. On reaching the grand entrance hall of the library, she found William waiting. Removing the coat folded over her arm, she handed it to him. He held it open; then, she slipped in her arms, and put on her gloves. Outside, they walked slowly out to the Grove. She said,

“This morning, youthful memories of the passing of summer’s oppressiveness, and the first days of autumn came to my mind. Though we are now well into the season, today felt like its

beginning. When I first came here, my spirit was attuned to such simple pleasures. There were times, particularly in the fall, that I would take time leaving campus. When the sky was clear, the air was cool, and a harvest moon was rising; the unique beauty of the campus landscape, its stately Classical architecture, and the old trees in the Grove casting shadows on the stone walkways, refreshed me. The sound of young men laughing drifted down from the hill. The scene projected a quality of tradition, deeply connected to the past, and having a lively existence in the present. In the light of noon, all seemed more spacious, greener, and frantic with movement. Only in the evening, as one walks the campus when the day is ending, do the feelings merge: you are both witness and participant in the life of the institution. The triumphs, tragedies, and the ordinary events of academic life, past and present, are suggested as each step into the familiar reveals the unknown. The mix of faces and voices is forever changing during the day, but at night, the stroll reminds a person of the transitory nature of the experience. Those in midlife feel this more intensely: realizing as fundamental the regularity of formation and dissolution of personal connections is part of maturity. Still, one might remember for a lifetime the friendly voice of a housekeeper resounding in an empty hall bidding you a good evening. I am thinking more about such things as time goes on."

"Poetic thoughts, Julia... literally: It sounds like free verse. Still, there is melancholy in all of it. We will leave this place behind when summer comes. As soon as it gets warmer - maybe the end of March - I will try to finish what I started with the carillon. A few of the fellows and two young ladies volunteered to solder the leaks in the pneumatic tubes inside the console. Do you want to help?"

"Yes! I have been doing so much better since the doctor prescribed the pills for the fainting. Now, my confidence is restored; and I am ready to try my best."

"That is what I like to hear! You can rummage about for those all fashion blouses and wool skirts, if you like. It will remind me of the old times. Oh, before I forget, the chief librarian downstairs asked me to give you an envelope. One moment, I will retrieve it from my briefcase." William handed Julia his walking stick; then, he

opened his case part way to remove a large envelope. On handing it to her, he retrieved his stick and shut his case. Julia was surprised to receive an envelope from the archive in Saint George. Eagerly, she opened it, and began to read.

The contents of the envelope were shocking. There, on photographed pages, was a letter from the commander of the garrison that was stationed in Gilridge after the town fell to the British during the Revolution. As he surveyed the hill north of the churchyard, he found a long rectangular depression in a clearing. An old gentleman named Osborne, who lived nearby told him that the victims of smallpox were buried there. He had been a young man when an Indian woman was brought to town in a dugout by a slave from a plantation upriver. The slave was instructed by his master to trade the woman for a keg of nails and twelve pounds of wax. The trade was made, and the slave rowed back from whence he came. She was sold to a family that had recently arrived from Charleston. A day later, she became ill. The old man was not sure of exactly when the town learned she had smallpox, but Mr. Gilridge ordered her taken into the deep woods and left there to die. The slaves who carried out this deed were ordered to shackle her leg to a tree to keep her from coming back. Not long after the slaves returned, they fell ill. This time, Gilridge put the men in the “old stockade” and left them there to die. Before they had expired, the Charleston family was ill. All of them, sick or not – free and enslaved – were herded into the stockade under the threat of being shot. Eight others from the town soon joined them. Deprived of food and water, the ill succumbed rapidly. Those imprisoned that were not ill were forced to carry the dead up to the hill to the mass grave under the watchful eyes of men with muskets following at a safe distance. Eventually, all the inmates contracted the disease and died. With the last, branches were heaped on top of their bodies where they lay and set on fire. The stockade was fired as well.

The commander and his soldiers were mortified by the brutality of Gilridge. Not satisfied to leave the catalog of horrors incomplete, the old man told how the town confiscated the land and possessions of the victims. When a delegation from Charleston

arrived to inquire about the settlers, they were told the families moved upriver to claim tracts of abandoned Indian land. Anybody mentioning a word about what had happened was threatened with death. When the charter of the town was granted and the parish church was built, the vestry wanted to place a stone cross on the mass grave, but never carried through with their memorial. Gilridge, several years after the incident, set out to find the plantation that had sent the Indian woman. The planters laughed at him. The Indians had removed to the headwaters of the river long before they settled. They found the notion of sending a slave to sell an Indian woman absurd. Gilridge then argued that if the slave had escaped, the woman could have guided him to freedom. Slaves who escaped upriver were taken in by the tribes. He didn't believe the planters, but could prove nothing. The old man concluded his narrative with a gruesome epilogue. He and his sons took their dogs out to hunt near a place called Mulberry Hill. There they found the scattered bones of the Indian woman. The shackle still contained her leg bone and the chain attached to it was embedded into the tree after many years of growth. They collected up all the bones they could find, and buried them at the top of the hill. The commander commended him on his decency, and promised to have his men build defenses away from the mass grave. The remainder of his letter is concerned with military matters.

Julia could not believe what she was reading. The founder of Gilridge was no better than the Germans who executed innocent Belgian civilians. He was a murderer! Then her thoughts turned to the poor dying woman chained to a tree... on Mulberry Hill. The college was built on Mulberry Hill, and the library was at the highest point! She returned the letter to the envelope, and walked out to the lake. Sitting on the bench, she remained motionless – her limbs growing numb, and heart dropping. William, sensing that something was wrong, asked,

“What is it?” Julia muttered, “

“How could it be? It started with the misplaced letter that Clara found, and it ends with the scattered bones of another tormented woman. Perhaps, in the Grove, nearly two hundred

years ago... Frightening! What could be worse than to be left weak and suffering? Alone, with the chill of night closing in around you... and knowing you are going to die. I can see it all with my mind's eye! It is too real!"

Julia could not imagine how she had wandered into this world of bones. Her poetic musings about academic life were no longer possible – certainly not on this campus! The campus was a murder scene and burying ground! So was the town square!

November 20, 1921. Dr. Edward White could not bring himself to crawl out of bed. Once again, he had spent Friday and Saturday with the twins. This time, however, was different. Ethel wanted White to take her for a drive. It was overcast and cold, but getting out of Gilridge was refreshing. Liz had remained behind, hoping that her sister and the Professor would become closer. While she cared deeply for him, too; it was clear that Ethel was in love. Furthermore, she sensed that he was drawn to the gentler of the two. That afternoon, for the first time in years, she went out with another fellow. It was ironic that Liz had devoted her weekends to White exclusively for such a long time only to let herself be deposed by Ethel, the sister who only recently was letting fellows take her to speakeasies. Even so, she realized that her bold sensuality and passion could not break down his wall. She had seen over its heights at least once. There was bitterness and a profound sense of loss. Maybe Ethel, she thought... she hoped. She could not.

About three o'clock Sunday morning, it began to rain. Edward White was awakened by a thunderclap. As it became light, he could see through his window a continuous torrent battering the evergreens. The lightning flashes were brilliant, illuminating the whole room for an instant. The violence of the storm was short lived, yet the intensity of the downpour didn't slack readily. Eventually, a steady rain followed the dramatic introduction, continuing through the day. White felt as though it was hiding him.

On their outing, Ethel earnestly politicked for her cause – marriage. At first, she hinted. When it became apparent to her that he wasn't going to pick up the dialogue, her strategy turned to a more direct approach. She told him that their current arrangement could not go on indefinitely. Considering that he had an abiding need for feminine companionship, and either she or her sister was willing to offer it freely if he could make up his mind. She told him it was in the best interest of all to take action. If he wanted a high-class intellectual lady instead, he was doing the twins a disservice by keeping them from pursuing their happiness with other fellows. White was taken aback by this forthright ultimatum. He pulled off the road, and walked out into a fallow field. Ethel, now worried that her bold move had backfired, cautiously followed at a distance. Standing under a pecan tree, he pondered the dilemma. For several years, he drew Liz out of the ensemble of admiring females to stand above all others as his supreme confidant. Having eventually set aside the rest, he monopolized her time and heart for more than a year. Ethel was merely an occasional visitor to the closed world of their comradeship. Only after the lively appendage was caught up in the speakeasy raid several month back did it become a trio. He had not thought much about the sister before the night he was trapped in their flat. Thenceforth, friendly rivalry drove the pace of things. Now, the course of events was forced to its natural conclusion. White couldn't afford the lose both. He had to propose to one!

Ethel, growing ever more nervous, began singing under her breath a tune that had popped into her head, an Irving Berlin song, *All By Myself*. White, distracted from his thoughts, turned back to look at her. She grinned, and started to sing aloud. He chuckled. This prompted her to start dancing to her singing – double time. He erupted in a fit of laughter. She, however, sang and danced all the harder until she tripped up and toppled over into the broom straw. White reached down to pick her up. When their laughter subsided, he asked Ethel to marry him. She didn't hesitate in saying, "Yes!"

When alone in his house that Saturday night, he realized the enormity of his decision. Ethel would be subjected to snub and ridicule in his world. He was now following the path of his father.

She was not as strong as Liz, nor did she have her world wariness; rather, innocent as the saintly Clara, and as fragile as his mother. How could he protect her? He felt as though he had wronged both the twins. Having followed his inclination to find a companion that mirrored the lightheartedness, empathy, and simplicity of his mother, he had misled Ethel into thinking he wanted a wife. He didn't! His reputation was a fraud! Women like Professor Powell could see through him – so, he thought. Having perceived Julia as an obstacle, he planned to dismiss her to clear the path for hiring his protégée, Clara. When Clara died, he dismissed her just the same; then, he defamed her and her husband with lies and gossip. It was completely irrational – a punishment for having lived while his true favorite was in her grave.

At a quarter of noon, White dragged himself from the bed and typed a letter to his father telling him that he planned to marry. Stating that he would like to return home for the ceremony, he preferred all the arrangements to be completed by the end of April. The date selected was the second Saturday in May. In closing, he stated that, according to the agreement, he would join him in partnership. Agreement, indeed! It was in writing, too! White's inexplicable rise in academia was purchased. His father poured a vast sum into endowments to grease the skids for his son, a mediocre scholar. Like Faust, the young man could experience the fullness of life's offerings – authority and responsibility, in particular: the elixir that would transform a pampered weakling into a shrewd businessman. There was a catch in the contract – marriage. If White married a woman who did not come with wealth or political connections, he was required to take a position in the family business. If he didn't, the money would stop flowing, and he would be left to support his household with his own earnings. Ethel was his undoing. As they say, "Out of the Frying-Pan, into the Fire!"

It continued to rain in varying intensities throughout the afternoon. He turned to working on the thesis Clara had left unfinished. Having been distracted by his weekends frolicking with the twins, he had neglected the manuscript. The dean had stated, in

no uncertain terms, that the college could not grant a posthumous degree on the weight of an unfinished thesis. There was talk of conferring a posthumous honorary degree for her literary work. However, the college took the editorial work out of his hands and gave it to a true genius – a poet laureate. He was left with the scraps: while it was her work, he had found Clara and engineered the program for her research. Somehow, he hoped to finish it would tip the scales in his favor. It was a delusion.

The academic career of Edward White would have provided elitist social scholars with a suitable case study to support their noxious theories. Given all the advantages to insure his success, he was compelled by his internal clockwork to gravitate towards enterprises that would negate his ambitions. His parents planted failure in his genes and mind. They gave him a blueprint for Ethel, or somebody like her. The insecurity and mistrust of his father impelled him to control everyone for their own good. It was a character trait that the old man had deliberately drilled into his son through direct application. It was a methodology Edward abhorred, but could not avoid using reflexively. He did not trust in Clara's abilities enough to allow her to develop her research plan. Ironically, she trusted him. After Clara died, he turned to Liz. The more she wanted him, the less he trusted her. There was Julia Powell. She mirrored him: they mistrusted each other from the start. Then, there was Ethel. She was exactly like his mother, so she was too naïve to be trusted with herself. There it was, in a nutshell: he didn't trust women. He could admit it – the most terribly self-destructive element of his character. With his marriage to Ethel, the course of his life could drift towards a duplicate of his parents. Under the absolute control of his father, it was a near certainty... unless he trusted Ethel. Did he really love her enough to do such a thing?

Julia was recruited to play the organ for church services that day. The regular organist, an old lady who could hardly make it up the stairs to the choir loft without getting winded, was suffering from a bout of tendonitis. It was becoming a routine occurrence,

and Julia was asked to take over the position. She declined not only because of the planned move to Missoula, but because working with the choir was a profound irritation – in particular, the soprano soloist who thought her voice endowed her with a special connection to the Divine. This songbird insisted on singing the same dozen nauseatingly sentimental solos over a muddy registration of flute stops with full vibrato. Julia, with her classical training, despised the overuse of vibrato and the swell pedal. By contrast, the soloist complained to everybody about everything Julia played. It was too loud, too fast, and too shrill. When Julia played anything using a sixteen foot diapason in the pedals and an open diapason chorus with mixtures on the Great manual – this is, the big metal pipes on the façade of the instrument and the tiny little pipes tuned to harmonics above the fundamental (organ lingo for loud and bright) – the soprano made a scene by covering both ears with her hands. Her disapproval, she thought, was supposed to mean something.

This Sunday, however, the soloist was being particularly obnoxious; and Julia, after having had the lower half of her dress wet by blowing rain, was not in a good mood. The piece the soprano selected was new – something she had learned by singing along with a phonograph record. She had purchased the sheet music, but had never rehearsed with it. When they read through it before church, she discovered that it was in a key outside her range. She demanded – not asked – that Julia transpose the score to a higher key. Julia did so while sight reading. Then the soprano wanted her to bend the rhythm and tempo to fit her “inspired interpretation.” She actually used those words. This became a painful exercise in mind reading. Julia complained,

“Why not sing it as written?” The soprano snapped back,

“You’re not very good, are you?” Julia choked back her rage, and proceeded to make her preparations for the service.

For her preservice music, she played Bach’s *Prelude and Fugue in A minor*. When she reached the middle section of the prelude with its impressive solo pedal passage, she spied the soprano with ears

covered, tapping her foot in disapproval. After Julia finished the prelude, the soprano whispered to her neighbors in the soprano section,

“Goodness, that girl likes to play her scales!” This was all the abuse that Julia was willing to take.

When the time came for the solo, she threw the soprano into a panic when she played the introduction to the song in the key that it was written. The woman tried to get her to stop, but Julia continued. When it came time for her victim to sing, the diva began in the wrong key. Julia began singing the solo in her clear, well-trained alto voice. Some members of the congregation turned around to listen to the fine soloist they had never heard before. When she had finished, she smiled at the dumbfounded soprano, and then threw the sheet music at her. After services, Julia received many compliments on her solo. William, who had been sitting downstairs met her in the vestibule with a look a great satisfaction on his face, and said,

“That was wonderful! I’ve never heard that song before.” She replied,

“Me, too. The soloist was having trouble with her throat.” After saying that, she became lightheaded, and needed to be helped to a pew. After several minutes, the sensation passed. When Reverend Smallwood came to congratulate her on a fine performance, she said,

“Solo? That was easy! What about the prelude?”

After arriving home from church, Julia sat down to the meal that Dora, the housekeeper, had prepared for them. The old lady “had enough church” and preferred to avoid “long-winded sermons on sins she couldn’t commit any more.” Dora said,

“Preachers spend their whole week thinking about sins. It’s their business. If they only realized that the rest of us were too busy and tired out to think about some of these sins, much less commit them, they would talk about something else.” William thought this

was funny, but Julia considered it disrespectful. Her recent discovery had sobered her view of atrocities committed by the busy and industrious deprived of moral guidance.

Wanting to have an article ready for submission in the coming week, Julia told William after dessert that she needed to work on her colonial research that afternoon. During the previous week, she spent her free time pursuing her inquiry in the archives of several town departments. William was encouraged to see her interest in her original scholarly pursuits return after the devastating upheaval that followed in the wake of the epidemic. In her study, Julia typed up a short article about the smallpox incident in colonial Gilridge. Using the testimony of Mr. Osborne and the 1781 map of the defensive line the British had constructed during their occupation, she isolated several lots where the mass grave might be located. Osborne's deed filed in 1769 stated that he purchased Lots 51, 52, and 53 in the town plot. These lots were on the hill above the original settlement. The lots next to Osborne's property, 48 through 50, stayed in the possession of the Gilridge heirs until 1813, when they were seized for back taxes. From assessments, Julia learned that the first house on any of the lots was built in 1823. Presumably, that a mass grave once occupied one of the lots was no longer a part of living memory at the time. From the records of the vestry of the old parish church, she found a reference to an effort to erect a stone cross on the "graves of those on the hill" that died before the town was incorporated. There is no further mention of it after 1774.

In the town public library, Julia found several photographs showing the construction of a retaining wall that ran the distance of lots she suspected contained the mass grave. That photograph was dated July, 1884. The site was being prepared for the construction of a brick fire station. The old house was in a state of being dismantled. She immediately wondered whether during construction of the firehouse bones were uncovered. Paging through fragile and musty issues of the *Messenger*, she found an article that described such a discovery. Workers installing pipe through Lot 51 found several skeletons presumed to be a man and

two children. The county coroner determined that the bodies had been buried long before the house was built. He presumed by the orientation of the bones that the bodies had been buried without caskets. He thought they might have been victims of the 1813 yellow fever epidemic. Nevertheless, he stated the bones would be placed in coffins and reburied in the Potters Field. She wondered what the city fathers would have thought of the burial of a founding family in paupers' graves. Puzzled that only three skeletons were found, she went to the county courthouse to find the report. In the basement, the old files of the coroner's office were stored.

On finding the report, she discovered that the coroner at that time made a drawing of where the bones were found on the lot. Placing a mark to represent the grave on a piece of tracing paper, she positioned it on the British maps of defensive works: it fit a bulge in the line of artillery emplacements. It looked like the commander kept his word. She assumed the workers had found the bodies at one or the other edge of the grave. The fact that children were found mortified her. Not only did Mr. Gilridge and the founders have no reservations about murdering women; they treated children with no mercy.

At the office of the Superintendent of Water and Sewer, Julia found the engineer's drawing of the pipes leading from the main into the fire station. She sketched out a rough copy of the drawing. At home, she prepared a neat version with William's drafting tools. Finally, she paid a visit to the fire station to pace out the location of the grave.

Having met the fire chief beforehand, she found the gentleman very interested in her research. Following a line from the water main, the two walked the lawn on the north side of the perpendicular to the side street to an open area about twenty feet from the retaining wall. Julia noticed an almost imperceptible rise where the pipes were buried. Otherwise, the whole yard was graded flat. Julia asked how difficult it would be to conduct an exploratory dig in the yard. He explained that an arrangement had to be made

between the college and the town. However, she would have to present her research before the city council first.

As the rain beat against the window in her study, Julia typed the final page of her article. Her closing remarks included a suggestion that the study should continue under the supervision of a trained archaeologist. With her article complete, she sealed it in an envelope ready for the next day's mail.

November 21, 1921. When Julia arrived for work in Special Collections, she found an envelope on her desk. It was from Dr. White. Opening it, she was shocked to find an offer to return to the History Department, assuming her previous position and load of courses. Uncharacteristically, he apologized for having dismissed her from her position on the grounds that her credentials were insufficient to justify keeping her in the department. Prior to his appointment, the former chair stated, her record of publication in the field more than sufficed for her lack of a doctorate in the discipline. He regretted having not considered this before acting. He closed with a short statement saying that he planned to step down from his position during the summer after attending to a pressing matter concerning the family business.

Julia didn't know what to think. Here was an actual apology from the arrogant upstart White! Had he found religion, or somebody a few rungs below the Devine put him in his place? Without hesitation, she typed out a short note to White thanking him for the peace offering, but stated that she was happy in her present position, and found it appropriate considering the state of her health. Except for occasional lightheadedness, there was nothing serious about her condition at that moment. It provided her with an alternative to a candid rejection of his offer. She sensed that White was not entirely forthcoming with the true reason he had dismissed her. Yet, had she known that Clara, upon completion of her thesis, was her replacement, Julia would have been mortified.

Sometimes, unlikely collisions between unrelated events occur. Before the epidemic, the town council had received an impressive amount of money from the Gales family; that is, the wealthy parents of Emma Louise Gales who succumbed to purulent pneumonia while in France. The gift was earmarked for improvements to the town square. The centerpiece was to be an ornate fountain memorializing the heroic, but soon forgotten nurse. The family had also made a gift to Emma's college for the creation of a serene garden in her memory. The latter was completed within a year of her death, but work on Gilridge Square was delayed. During the summer of 1921, the council decided to publish a solicitation for bids; and by October, contracts for the work had been awarded. When Julia and Clara had their last conversation, they discussed an earlier unearthing of the remains of a section of the ancient palisade wall. Since late Colonial times, the site of the original settlement was an open courtyard separating three Georgian buildings, the town hall at center, the old court house to its right, and on the left, the old town library and theatre. Water and sewer pipes were laid to these buildings as well as a gas line, but none cut through the center of the square. Now, the whole square was going to be dug up – the first time to a significant depth. Digging commenced on Friday. Julia, engrossed in her work, knew nothing about that. Work resumed early Monday. By the time Julia had dropped her article in the mailbox on campus, workmen found the first bones. Digging was immediately brought to a halt. The county coroner, Dr. Hugh Wilson, along with police chief Carlton Babbitt, came within a half-hour. Later, they were joined by Sheriff Tate. Technically speaking, it was a town matter, but Tate was curious. There were several unresolved disappearances in the county that lingered from the war years. Coroner Wilson told the sheriff,

“In the past, the square was graded, and its paths were paved with brick. With the foundation and the plumbing for the fountain, it was necessary to excavate deep. That is why the bones were not found earlier. Charcoal was mixed in with the fragmented bones. Apparently, a hole was dug in the center of the square, and the burnt wood and bones were raked into it.” He continued by saying

it had happened long ago – an archaeological discovery, not a recent crime scene. His assistant, Mr. Claymont, would collect the bones and send them to the state university. They had an archaeologist and a fine laboratory. Wilson said he intended to take photographs and make a few drawings. Work would have to continue around them. Pointing to the hole, he said,

“Look at those fellows down in the hole! I can tell you right off the bat that their bodies were burned. That is it! We will never know what happen to them.” Tate shrugged, and said,

“People die all the time. I admit we can’t know more about any of them than we know. If they behaved themselves, they did honest work, had children, paid bills, grew old, and died, that is all. Outside of that, we really don’t know them.” Dr. Wilson walked over to the pit where the bones were uncovered. Mr. Claymont, his assistant, was inside looking at a charred skull. Wilson turned to the sheriff, and said,

“I assume it happened when there were palisade walls around this square, when the first settlers were here. What do you think – maybe, a dozen or so log shacks inside? One of them catches fire, and the men inside don’t make it – too bad, probably drunk.” Tate answered,

“That was in the 1700s before the town. They didn’t keep records as far as I know; on the other hand, if they did, they’re long gone.” Wilson laughed, and said,

“The principal activity of civilized man is to keep records! It doesn’t have to be in writing, but it must be done. This is what happens when uncivilized men rule. We uncover their handiwork, and chase our tails trying to solve unanswerable puzzles. We can’t! The key pieces are missing!”

The sheriff left Dr. Wilson and his assistant to their work. Returning to his office, Tate puzzled, “What did he mean by uncivilized men? Did he mean the settlers?” Of course, he did. That was the crux of his theory. The “species” of man had a tacit partnership. Brutes, outcasts, and failures are the forward guard for

civilization. After clearing the way for the planters, merchants, lawyers, and clergymen, their services are no longer needed. Most become civilized and respectable. Some become leaders; and those that continue in their ways become outlaws and serfs. There really was not a division of mankind, Sheriff Tate concluded. Everybody was culpable! Judging, nevertheless, was not his job.

Julia was not surprised when the *Messenger* reported that bones had been found in the town square. It was a validation of what she had uncovered with her research. Nevertheless, she was not going to say anything about it until her article was published. Coroner Wilson told the paper it looked as though the two men had perished in a house fire long ago. Let the town continue thinking that fiction. Likewise, the fire chief did not know the full story about the small pox incident, so he wouldn't make the connection. She edited out the murders during their meeting to ensure his cooperation. The journal article would not appear until the summer, after she was in Montana. What began the Thursday before Clara's death would not end for Julia until she had a copy of the article in hand. The ancient crime would be exposed. The legacy of the tyrant Gilridge would be tainted forever. The town would have to live with it.

CHAPTER FIVE

December 2, 1921. In the weeks following the discovery of the bones, Julia returned to her research on the epidemic. Discovering the dark secret of Gilridge was not a profound work of scholarship by her reasoning. It was basic archival research mixed with a little field study, and half of the work had been accomplished by the archivist at Saint George. In the context of state history, it was a tragic footnote. Nevertheless, it set her mind to pondering the notion that a place could have hidden dangers – natural, manmade, and a fusion of both – and it could kill. William, while not enthusiastic that Julia had returned to her obsession, found her concept fascinating. She was assembling empirical data to support her hypothesis. Drawing on the incomplete work of Dr. Bates and her own mapping project, she was ready to undertake a “walk-through” of the landscape of death.

Just before 4:30 that afternoon, Julia gathered up her notes from the influenza study and took William on a drive downtown. She parked outside a shoe store on First Street, and they started their walk northward to the depot. The street lamps were decorated with wreaths and garland for the season. Strings of large, brightly colored, light bulbs spanned the width of the street high above from telephone poles. The shops with their festive window displays were crowded with holiday shoppers. When Julia reached the offices of the tobacco company, she remarked that a broker that worked there had taken the flu to the suburbs. Several other employees of the company fell ill the same week. Passing an apartment building a block from the depot, she remarked that the number of cases at that one address had been higher than the rest on the street. It housed mostly young single men who worked in the offices of the railroad, and was the first building to be quarantined. When they reached the depot, they found it buzzing with activity. It was now 5:05. The sun had set, and the day shift

workers were leaving. Julia saw a young lady leave the freight office, and walk towards them. Julia whispered to William,

“There! Likely, she worked with Miss Gales. Let us see where she goes.”

The lady walked to the corner, then made her way uphill, past the Railroad Hotel, into the district known as the Horse Pond. Since the end of the war, a new gasoline station had been built at the corner of Third and Mulberry. Several of the boarding houses were knocked down to make way for commercial development. The easternmost reaches of the Horse Pond were being erased. The neighborhood was doomed to disappear eventually. Prohibition had closed the brewery; the railroad needed more land for its new car shops and warehouses. A new high school had recently been completed to replace the three smaller ones on the north side of town, and the old depression known as the Horse Pond, was being filled in. Condemned as a breeding ground for mosquitoes, this natural feature had acquired its name in antebellum times before the railroad was built. In those days, that part of town was a vast unproductive plantation.

Julia still found the thought of two young women enjoying themselves on a Friday, then dying less than a week later, painful. As she watched the woman from her office ascend the hill, she could not help thinking that Emma, whoever she was, followed the same path. Her boarding house, belonging to a Mrs. Huffman, was less than a block away. Julia also felt remorseful for not having tried to learn more about her short, tragic life. Maybe, the next lady exiting the freight office might be willing to speak with them. They did not have to wait long, and she was definitely perfectly willing to speak at length. It was the bright and lively Ethel Rouse. After Julia introduced herself and told her about her study, Ethel opened the floodgate.

“Oh, you’re from the college! You must know Dr. Edward White! We are engaged to be married in the spring!” On saying this, she showed Julia an impressive diamond ring. Julia, dumbfounded, beheld the stone in amazement. William chuckled, and said,

“My word, young lady! You snagged that sly devil, didn’t you?”
Julia regained her composure, then asked,

“Did you happen to know a young lady named Emma Gales?”
Immediately, a hint of sadness crossed Ethel’s face.

“The way they treated that girl wasn’t right! No funeral; and when that nice couple put up enough money to move her to a decent grave, it turned out her body was stolen! That’s what I think. The caretaker at the cemetery thinks she ended up in the mass grave by mistake. Coroner Wilson believes a relative dug her up from Potters Field and took her off to put in a family plot. Nothing adds up! Something else: she saved her money? Yes, she did! It was enough to bury her in decent style. She hid it from her landlady. She is crooked!” William asked,

“Is that what you think, Miss Rouse?”

“The girls who live in those Horse Pond boarding houses are not as safe as you might think. So, they are run by ladies... That doesn’t mean a thing.” Julia asked,

“Have you ever lived in one of them?”

“No, we are better off than that. Our place is above McNeely’s Shoes & Boots. Really, Liz and I have the whole third floor to ourselves. The stairs are around back. I don’t like that. Still, it is better than having some greedy, prune-faced harpy cheating you out of half what you make, and stealing the rest when she can. Emma said it was like that... She said Mrs. Huffman cheated her, and then treated her like dirt on top of it all. Now, I’ve been wondering why the railroad didn’t take up a collection to have her buried in the proper way earlier. Do you know?” William and Julia shook their heads in disbelief. Ethel didn’t wait for an answer. She continued without break. “Since you are friends of Edward, I’ll tell you. The older lady who works with us, Polly... whenever somebody called out her name, Emma would look up from what she was doing... you know, like it was her name being called. Occasionally, she would say ‘yes’ at the same time as Mrs. Allen. As for saying she was from a farm; I didn’t believe it. Her hands gave

her away. I think she was trying to hide from somebody. Now, that is just what I think. I told that to Sheriff Tate. Did you know that people disappeared during the sickness and never showed up again? The sheriff isn't letting it go. You might want to visit him. He is a real gentleman – oh, and I think he likes my sister Liz. By the way, Emma and Liz were friends. I was with them on the Friday before she died.” Julia, overwhelmed by Ethel's nonstop meandering narrative, exclaimed,

“Yes, please tell us! It would be very helpful.” Ethel smiled, then continued,

“I suppose she walked home to primp, and later met Liz. They had a bite to eat at the Railroad Hotel; after that, they went to the picture show. I was across the street at the Walnut Café dancing with the fellows. They came over after the show.” At that moment, the colorful lights on First Street came on all at once. Ethel's eyes lit up with delight. Julia said,

“She liked to dance! Where does one dance around here?”

“The Walnut Café used to have a dance hall and saloon. It was packed every Friday and Saturday with folks from the office. Sometimes, soldiers... they would dance the whole night long, and had a good old-time... some of them met up with girls there and hitched up. Since everything went away, it's calmed down around here. Is that how you two met? Dancing? When you were young? Well, I suppose not.” Irritated, Julia answered,

“We have a common interest in music.” William laughed. Ethel pressed onward.

“Music lovers! Well, I suppose the only places you'll hear music around here these days are up at your college, in church, or on the phonograph at the billiard room. They tell me, sooner or later it will come in by radio – it has already been done somewhere, you know. Not anytime here, I think. Frankly speaking, the respectable place to go is the high-class hotel on the Southside. The food is good at the Railroad Hotel; but the fancy stuff, like oysters and tender steaks, all that – go over there. They have a piano player, and sometimes a fellow who sings some pretty tunes. It's all

candlelight stuff, you know. They have a dance floor. Liz is expecting me at six, so I have to go. Tonight, we are going to learn how to drive after supper. Well, not exactly... we have a book that tells you all about it. Still. I'm excited! Good night!"

On the walk back to their automobile, Julia told William that she had learned how to dance in school, but had never attended a dance for fear of wilting during the waltz. William laughed. He had never had the inclination to learn, and it was impossible for him to do so if the desire to learn entered his mind at this late moment. Then, he remembered that Clara was always at the dances held at the college, but never danced. She was always serving refreshments, or something of the like. He had never seen her dance, nor did she appear to feel the rhythm and flow of the music like the rest of the wallflowers. She couldn't dance! Julia stopped in her tracks,

"William, you are right! There are two types of people in this world that like music: those who feel it, and those who think it! Most musicians straddle the fence, but the average person feels it. I do not feel music, but I can look at a score and hear it in my mind; and visualize the fingerings as I read, almost without thinking. That is not the same as feeling music. You can tell who feels it by the way their body moves. I played the piano several times for Clara. She sat perfectly still with her eyes closed – listening, thinking, but not feeling! You're right!" William asked,

"Why is that important?"

"I am in agreement with Dr. Bates. Influenza was brought here on the trains, and it gained its foothold in the blocks near the depot. The social life of the young people of the neighborhood promoted the contagion – dancing and the picture show. There is no reason to believe that Clara came here to partake in any of it. Rudy Mallard, I recently learned, played his trumpet in the Walnut Café dance band; and there is a picture in an old issue of the school newspaper showing him playing there during the Founder's Day Festival. Milly Yeats and Milton Pratt were always at the dances – both loved to show off the latest steps. Likely, they ventured into

this neighborhood to refine their skills. White, of course, made this place his playground. Aside, what do you think of his lady-love?"

"She is sweet, Julia... very sweet... I hope he does not break her heart. What do you make of it?"

"He sent a note to the library inviting me to return to the department, restoring all my classes. He apologized for having wronged me... As you might expect, I declined... He is in love. I am sure of it." William laughed. Julia did not join in the laughter. Rather, she maintained a serious tone.

"The wind is coming from the north, and the temperature is dropping. We had better go home. This whole day has thrown me about like a rag doll. That is what I feel like every day – dashed against this wall, and then another. As soon as I think the world makes sense, it changes in an instant. Even within me, both body and mind flip me around and over until I am dizzy. Nothing is right, William! What happened to that poor girl?"

"Let us try to answer our questions about Clara first. We have a good idea where Emma was infected. "Tomorrow, ask Dora to make a large pecan pie – one with shavings of chocolate, and have her whip up some heavy cream. We'll take it over to Mr. and Mrs. Armistead that afternoon before evening services. Do not ask any questions, if they ask us to stay. Let them tell us about Clara. They are very lonely, and all they ever think about is her." Julia recoiled, and said,

"They might want to see you, but surely not me! I'm the 'wildcat' that dashed her hopes for happiness!"

"That's ridiculous, Julia! Not for one moment did they believe their daughter was in love with me. It was gossip that went the rounds for a week or two, and then faded away. Nothing at that college last more than two weeks, I tell you. It is always some ludicrously impossible love affair between two people that happen to sit together for lunch more than once. During your exile in Special Collections, rumor has it that I have taken up with a pretty young librarian. It seems that I divorced the 'wildcat' over the summer."

“What?”

“Yes, dear, I’m courting a pretty librarian who happens to be you. Now, let us return to the business at hand. Clara has a new champion, a former dean and professor emeritus, a poet laureate, and so forth. He has more or less taken on the task of editing and publishing her poetry leaving White in a ditch. Your old enemy still gets credit for discovering her work; however, the college is footing the bill, and they want somebody with editorial credentials. I have seen a few of the poems, and they are not love sonnets. Her literary voice is rather dark, and modern – another part of her hidden self.

“Do not call me pretty, William.

December 3, 1921. Dora, the cook and housekeeper, arrived early that morning to prepare meals for that day through the weekend. From afternoon onward, she planned to spend time with her grown children. This morning, Julia was making the pecan pie when Dora entered the kitchen. Dr. Powell was in the dining room having coffee.

Julia loved to cook, but rarely had the time. Usually, she left careful instructions for each meal on the kitchen table for Dora, and let her work alone. When she lived with Mrs. Phelps, it was an occasional activity that allowed the two ladies the opportunity to banter while exercising their creativity. Susy, the housekeeper, was off on those days, so they could give their imagination free reign. Mrs. Phelps, the aged widow, was a nurturing, but witty sort, who enjoyed the company of people in general. Though she never had children, Lydia was motherly. She was the dead opposite of Julia’s distant and dismissive mother. Frequently, after Julia had married, she visited Mrs. Phelps on walks to the college and back. She had a young lady from the college living with her named Charlotte that was very chatty and energetic. The two seemed to get along well. Occasionally, Julia would join them for tea in the parlor. A large portrait of a young Lydia presided over the room. Julia marveled, she had been beautiful in her youth – just short of six-foot tall,

flaxen haired, and perfectly proportioned. At nearly seventy, her hair had grayed, but her skin and complexion was still smooth and youthful. Her smile was exactly the same. Julia had asked her why, since she was well-liked by the available gentlemen of her age, that she did not remarry. Diverting her gaze in the direction of the entrance hall – the place where her husband collapsed from a stroke and died – she would sigh, and then change the subject. Regardless, she frequently talked about “my Herbert.” She was nineteen when she married the dashing and successful thirty-year-old architect. Throughout their marriage, he was unfailingly optimistic and jovial, treating Lydia with the utmost respect and was constantly attentive. Herbert took her everywhere he went, and talked to her about everything. Unfortunately, he “overworked himself,” and died at the age of fifty-four. She said,

“He came in the front door – gave me a bear hug and a kiss on the cheek – then, when I turned to hang his coat, I heard him hit the floor. It was like he was struck by lightning!”

Julia did not like to listen to her reflect on this tragic event. William was older than she, very much like Herbert in disposition, but already had health problems. Nevertheless, Herbert provided amply for Lydia, and she preferred to remain unattached for the remainder of her years. Julia told the entire story of her enjoyable times cooking with Lydia Phelps to Dora. It was difficult for the working class grandmother to understand her – actually, she thought Julia was off in the head. She mumbled to herself, and tripped over the furniture; she played strange music on the piano; and now, for the first time, she was actually cooking something! Dora could only shake her head in disbelief, thinking, “I know he is a cripple, but couldn’t he have found a woman with common sense?”

Julia and William delivered their pie and sweet whipped cream to Andrew and Jane Armistead before three in the afternoon. Mrs. Armistead invited them to stay for spiced tea and freshly baked ginger cookies. Andrew was sitting in the living room gazing at the fire, but his mind was engaged in other considerations. On the mantle of the fireplace, on both sides of an ancient clock, there

were framed photographs of Clara at different stages of her life. On the arm of Jane's chair, there were several letters from the poet laureate concerning the publication of Clara's work. They were discussing one of the communications before William and Jane arrived. After exchanging cordialities, Jane volunteered the contents of a letter. Most of it praised their daughter's work in glowing terms. Regardless, Jane was reluctant to provide the editor with a detailed narrative of Clara's last days as he requested. Andrew, on the other hand, thought it was important that anybody reading her work needed to know about her decision to join the war effort. William was surprised. This was something completely new to him. He asked,

"The war effort? How so, Andrew?" He explained,

"Friday, the week before she died, Clara took the train to somewhere – she didn't say – but it was a military hospital. They were recruiting young ladies to be trained as nurses. When she returned Saturday morning, Clara told us she would be leaving the following week. We were not pleased, but couldn't say anything this time. She had wanted to go with her friend Emma Louise when she volunteered – poor girl, she died in France – but we discouraged her. The girls visited her before they left for training. We told her to stay in college." Jane placed the letters on her lap, and took off her reading glasses. Trying to retain her composure, she said,

"I'm sure you know about what happened to her fiancé, Frank?" Julia's eyes displayed a look of complete shock. She mumbled,

"Fiancé, Mrs. Armistead?" Jane answered in a mournful tone,

"Yes, poor Frank... he was a bright boy. He was Clara's sweetheart from the time they were in grade school. She never loved another boy, only him. Well, about a month before she died, Clara received a letter from his mother telling her he had been killed in action. He was what they call a 'Forward Observer' for the artillery. I never learned how he died. Clara contained herself at first, but it was very bad – you could see it. We were very worried

about her – worried she might do something to herself!” Andrew added,

“I know she was thinking about it. When you asked her, she would force a smile, say ‘I love you,’ then kiss you. It gave me chills! That’s the type of thing a person does when they are contemplating taking their own life.” Jane added,

“Then, she broke down and cried... It started when that nice Dr. White asked why she looked so pale. She said, afterwards, that she struggled to tell you, Julia; but her throat tightened up... Clara always said you treated her very warmly, like an older sister.” Tears started rolling down Julia’s cheek; she wiped them aside with her hand, and said,

“I wish she would have told me about the boy. I would have understood... she was such a good girl.” Andrew said,

“She couldn’t hold it back anymore. Dr. White and his assistance gave her coffee and took her out to the Grove on the other side of the college where she could calm down. She wanted to tell you first, Julia.” William said,

“I saw her crying on your porch. I wanted to ask her what had happened, but she ran into the house before I made it across the street.”

Julia squeezed William’s hand tightly. He whispered in her ear,

“Calm down, Julia...”

Andrew walked over to the mantelpiece, and removed one of the framed photographs. It was a picture of a handsome young man dressed in a winter coat standing in front of an automobile. Two young ladies dressed for the cold, each encircled by his arms, smiled broadly for the camera. Andrew said,

“There they are – Clara, Frank, and Emma Louise – they are all gone. That’s why we must tell the editor all about them.” William asked,

“Clara talked to me often, from the time she was a little girl until not long before she passed. Why didn’t she mention her friends, or even her writing?” Jane answered,

“Clara did not introduce anything into the conversation about herself unless somebody asked. Part of it was shyness. It was hard to tell with her being so active in church and the school... and those wonderful dramatic readings! I think she hid being shy... Dr. Polk helped her overcome it by introducing her to Shakespeare. As for her own writing, she didn’t think it was good. She liked history.”

During the course of the next hour, the conversation shifted to more pleasant remembrances of Clara. Mrs. Armistead brought out tea and cookies, and eventually the men started slicing up the pie. Julia tried to regain her composure. Clara’s kiss meant something entirely different! “How shameful I am,” she thought! “She wanted to tell me her fiancé had been killed, but I scolded her for being familiar! How could I have done such a thing? Then, on the last day we spoke it never crossed my mind to ask her about her loneliness. All her young friends were gone! I never knew why she was leaving school. My selfish, evil mind! – Good Lord, what a terrible person I am! Oh, and the things I wanted to say about her when White told his lies!”

When Julia and William returned home, William sat down on the couch, and said,

“Whatever you are thinking about; do not say it. We two have earned the champions’ cup in jumping to conclusions! The answers were right across the street all along. Clara was... Clara! Do you know what? It would not surprise me that if we went over to the *Messenger* office they could dig up an engagement announcement for Clara and Frank in less than a minute. Even so, Clara, shy thing that she was, wouldn’t have told anybody, unless they asked. Maybe, we forgot about it completely? Regardless, we now know that Clara boarded the train for another trip on Friday, a day after returning from the archives – to a military hospital, no less! Now, we must consider the possibility that if there was any contact

between Clara and the Miss Gales at the depot, it happened in the freight office. One likely gave the other influenza.” Realizing that one of the two was the source of the infection, Julia brought her hand to her mouth and gasped. William continued, “Yes, we have some likely paths. Clara picked it up at the hospital, gave it to the girl at the freight office; and in turn, she gave it to those who lived near the depot. They gave it to the Mallard boy *et al*, and it was brought to the college. The only place Clara went after returning home was to church and the hospital. So, you can trace it outward from those points. The second path begins with the girl at the depot – likely infected by somebody passing through – then to Clara, who likely brought the infection onto her train, and perhaps, to the military hospital. Well, you can now set your mind at ease. Clara did not contract influenza during her trip to the state archives. Also, nothing you said or did influenced her decision to leave school. She was following the call to duty.” Julia inhaled deeply, and then rose to her feet. After wringing her hands for a moment, she said,

“What do we do now?”

“Nothing, Julia, we say nothing.”

December 5, 1921. Throughout the beginning of December, temperatures had been pleasantly cool. The sky was clear consistently, revealing a vivid blue like at no other time of the year. Sunday night, the weather changed drastically. There was a hard freeze. Shortly before sunrise, dense clouds rolled in, and the mercury rose to a few degrees above freezing. A misting rain persisted throughout the morning. The ground, however, remained very cold. Droplets of rain formed a thin icy coating on brick and stone. At the college, it was “reading day.” Final exams would begin Tuesday morning. They would last into the next week, and commencement would follow on Saturday. After that, the college would be closed for Christmas Break. Dr. White arrived on campus shortly before nine o’clock. He had a meeting with the publication committee. Today, he would receive their decision concerning the publication of Clara’s completed thesis. Ascending the steps to the

college press in the administration building, he almost slipped on the granite steps, but regained his footing.

At noon, Ethel walked out of the freight office, and stood under the porch that ran along the side of the building. It was raining steadily by this time. Having left home late, she missed breakfast. Now, famished, she was growing impatient for a break in the weather. The dining hall of the Railroad Hotel was only a quick dash across the street. In her mind, she weighed the benefits of satiating the rumbling in her gut versus spending the afternoon in a damp dress. In a moment of impulse, she chose to make a dash for it.

Scrambling down the steps, she sprinted diagonally across the street. Scurrying over the slippery paving bricks, and side stepping puddles, she jumped the gutter and landed on the sidewalk. Her love of dancing seemed to have served her well in this display of athletic agility. Inside the dining hall, she raced across the room to the first available table. Her hair, white blouse, and her new shoes were wet, but she didn't care. After eating enough sliced beef and potatoes to carry her over, she made her way back during a break in the rain. Going back, she was not nearly as impatient.

On entering the office, she was met by an agitated and visibly worried Liz. Her boss, Mr. Hines was standing beside her with a pained look on his face. All the ladies in the office shared the same expression. Standing on the opposite side of Liz was a gentleman she had never seen before, but she sensed that he was about to say something terrible. With trembling in her voice, Liz said,

"Ethel, this is Mr. Dolan from the college. There's been an accident... oh... I can't..." Mr. Dolan continued from this point nervously,

"Dr. White is hurt... seriously... He's in the hospital. I need to take you there. He was asking for you... both of you." Ethel mumbled, almost in a whisper,

“Oh, no...”

Liz took Ethel’s arm, and they rushed out to Dolan’s automobile parked catty corner to the end of the building.

Dr. White had just completed his presentation of the completed book – formerly Clara’s thesis – to the publication committee. It was, in fact, an entirely different work. Both Clara and he were listed as coauthors, but his name had to be listed first. Having been freed of his perceived duty – or perhaps, obsession – to have her degree awarded posthumously, his original contributions made it a better book. The publication committee advanced it ahead other works that in press, including Clara’s creative writing. In a way, his effort backfired.

After leaving the publication committee, Dr. White walked out on the portico of the administrative offices, and slipped on the wet granite steps leading down to the courtyard. The impact was such that he crushed a vertebra in his back. In an instant, his life and that of Ethel changed forever. He could no longer walk. A few students took it upon themselves to take him in out of the rain and call for help. At the same time his fiancée was taking her seat for lunch; he was being rushed to the hospital. Before the ambulance arrived, he told Mr. Dolan where to find Ethel and Liz. When the sisters arrived at the hospital, they were not able to see him.

Tragic misfortune and heartbreaking revelations clustered around Clara’s postmortem career. The poor young woman had been dead for three years, and all that her champions had accomplished in their effort to memorialize her brief enigmatic life had magnified their own misery. Clara hardly seemed like a real person anymore. She was certainly not the little girl who grew up across the street! In death, she embodied the longings nurtured by the obsessed for the unattainable.

There was a break in the rain in midafternoon. The southbound express had just arrived at a quarter of four. On it was Charles Roth, a revenue agent that had come to Gilridge to pursue a tip that his office received concerning a rum running operation

organized by a boss known only as Pete. There was, however, more to it than that. The anonymous informant identified an associate of the man, Lucille Calder, as having information concerning several disappearances. She was unwilling to provide testimony without a guarantee of immunity from prosecution, and she needed protection. When he arrived, Sheriff Tate was waiting for Roth at the station. He knew about Lucille. She boarded with Mrs. Huffman, and had a reputation for being standoffish. Actually, nobody had the slightest idea from where she came, or how she supported herself. While she didn't have a criminal record as far as Tate could tell, Ethel told him that Lucille was from Atlanta. At least, that is what she had heard. After helping Roth check into a room at the Railroad Hotel, Tate persuaded the agent to join him in the dining hall for the roast beef special. It was about half-past five.

Sheriff Tate called out to a young lady waiting for a bag of sandwiches beside the cash register, "Barbara... over here!" Immediately, she perked up, and started looking around. From a table in the corner of the room, he waved his hand trying to get her attention. On seeing the sheriff, Barbara waved back, and said,

"Sheriff Tate! What are you doing over here?"

"Come on over and sit with us. I'll order you up a piece of cherry pie if you come sit with us a spell. What do you say?" She answered,

"It will be an honor, sir. If you can hold your horses a minute, I'll be right over. This gentleman wants his money."

After paying for her order, she joined the lawmen at their table. Tate asked Barbara,

"Have you been behaving yourself?"

"Don't say that! People will think you hauled me in! Say, who is your friend? Don't you know you're supposed to introduce your friends to a lady?"

"My apologies, Barbara, this is Mr. Charles Roth." Roth interjected,

“A pleasure to meet you, Miss Barbara.”

“Miss Barbara Waddell... Are you a relative of the sheriff?”

“Distant, Miss Waddell, but we have a lot in common. I’ll let that go for now. How are you doing?” She sighed, and said,

“Very well, I suppose... it’s not what it used to be around here. I’m getting tired of it. After all these years of working in the telegraph office, there is not much to show for it. About a year ago, there was a fellow working in the marshaling yards that was sweet on me, but it didn’t work out.” Tate asked,

“How so?”

“A boxcar rolled over him. Say, didn’t you pick up Ethel Rouse at a speakeasy a while back ago?”

“Did somebody tell you that?”

“It went the rounds, Sheriff. She must have wised-up, because she doesn’t come out on Fridays anymore. But I’ll tell you one thing: there is nothing bad about that girl. It is a matter of not having good judgment, if you ask me. Her sister has good sense, but not nearly as much fun. I hope you didn’t throw the book at poor Ethel?”

“No, Barbara. That’s what the judge does. What makes you think that?”

“They say you’re always checking up on her; and like I said, we don’t see her around on the weekends anymore.” Tate laughed, and said,

“She is engaged to be married. That professor from the college up and decided he wanted a wife who sings, dances, and eats horseradish, bacon and egg sandwiches – certainly clears your head out. Nobody but her eats those things! Still, she talked me into trying. Now, before we get into that, let me ask you something. Do you want a scoop of ice cream on your pie?”

“Yes, that would be so nice. I figure you want to ask me something else, too. That is, unless you want to court me – and that wouldn’t give me any problem. I’d sure like to see you back again

sending telegrams instead of Deputy Stone Face. Just think about that... That's right, Mr. Roth; your cousin is a mighty fine sweet-talker."

"I want to ask you about Lucille Calder."

"You don't want her, Sheriff! She's off in the head, if you ask me! She keeps herself shut up in that room all day, and then goes off with those Dibble boys at night. They're a strange sort, those two! Tate said,

"So, you think Lucille isn't quite right?"

"Most of the girls from the war days are gone. There are three of us, excluding Lucille. We, the three, are on the second floor of that big-old house – eating together, and everything. There are five new ones on the first. Back in the days, there were several girls on the third floor. That was Lucille, the girl who died that there has been so much fuss about, and the maid – I forget her name. All of them were strange! But I'll tell you, Mrs. Huffman treated that maid like dirt! No wonder she up and left without a word. She has always been a sweetie pie to us, but something about the maid girl got under her skin. Good Lord Almighty, I saw her slap that girl in the face for talking back! Maybe, that's why she left. Now, the girl who died had this sister who visited. Dark hair, just like her – they looked a lot alike. College girl, I think – not the type you find around here. Lucille and those two were closed mouthed, and didn't want to associate with us. There was the soldier from the camp named Pete that met up with them when they went on an outing together. He didn't like us either... He was their brother. I didn't like him – this fellow was mean looking! Mrs. Huffman acted like he was special, for some reason. Maybe, it was the uniform? Now, there was something strange those girls were planning. The sister whispered – I confess that I was eavesdropping; that's bad of me. Well, they were going to skip out on Mrs. Huffman; 'We're going to leave town. My friend will arrange everything.' That girl was something! Tate asked,

"Who was this friend?"

"I don't know, but the sister said he had connections. Now, crazy Lucille didn't want to go with them. She said she would rather go to jail! So, I mean it, Sheriff! You need to stay away from her... that is, unless you want to haul her off. Do you think you can order up that pie? The girls will think I got lost if I don't make it back with their sandwiches soon." Mr. Roth removed a photograph from his coat pocket and handed it to Barbara to examine. He said,

"Is this the sister, Barbara?"

"That's her!" She handed the photograph back to Roth. Tate told her,

"Now, I don't want you telling anybody we had this little talk." Barbara said,

"Why should I? It is too easy to get wrapped up in a mess somebody else made for themselves. Now, don't you think it is about time you order my pie?"

After enjoying her pie and coffee, Barbara hurried back to the boarding house with her bag of sandwiches. Roth handed the photograph to Tate, and said,

"She is nobody's sister. Her name is Alice Cowan. Recognize her? She attended college here a few years back... poof-gone, off the face of the Earth. Not really... her folks have big money. They claim that their daughter is in Europe, but she is in Richmond. Our informant said Miss Cowan sent a private investigator here a few months back to check up on Lucille. She is trying to get her out. Yet, I think there is more to it than that."

The final element in that day's triad of trouble was the unannounced arrival of Julia's mother on the evening express. When the telephone rang, William and Julia were sitting down to dinner. Dora, who had just placed the food on the table, frowned and said,

“That is an infernal contraption, if you ask me! It allows unwanted visitors to come into your home at dinner time! Do you really think anybody has something that so all-fire important to say this time of day?” William started to stand up, but Dora said,

“You stay put, Doctor. I’ll get it.” On returning from answering the telephone, she said,

“Mrs. Powell, there’s some dang-fool woman calling from the depot saying she is your mother. I’ve never heard you say anything about having a mother.”

“Yes, Dora, I needed a mother to be born. Please excuse me, William.” Julia stood up, and immediately rushed to the phone. Dora asked William,

“Where has she been all this time, Doctor?”

“I don’t know...It looks like you’ll be taking your handiwork back to the kitchen. On second thought, slice off enough of the roast for two sandwiches; and then, take the rest over to Dr. Polk while it is still hot. Take the rice, too; but leave the sweet potatoes. Wrap a couple of them up and place them in a bag with the sandwiches. Certainly, I am going to need my strength for this.”

On the drive to the depot, Julia was thoroughly unnerved. She didn’t say a word, but William could tell by her grip on the steering wheel that every muscle in her body was tense as a bow string. At the depot, she almost tripped walking up the steps to the passenger platform. William struggled to keep up with her. Mrs. Lawson, a regal, statuesque, graying blond of about sixty, waited impatiently at the far end of the platform. Briskly, Julia walked the length of the passenger shed to greet her.

Immediately, Julia through her arms around Mrs. Lawson, and said,

“Mother, it has been years... Why haven’t you written?” Mrs. Lawson gently removed Julia’s arms from around her. Her reply her daughter’s question was dismissive,

“There is nothing that I can tell you that you do not know, or cannot guess accurately. I have read the little notes you send from time to time, and find them entertaining. I assume the gentleman with the cane ambling this way is your husband? As long as he has money, that is all that counts. At least, you weren’t foolish enough to marry for love.”

Julia was shocked by her last statement. She married for love. However, William was now within earshot, so she said nothing. William greeted her saying,

“Mrs. Lawson, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.” Mrs. Lawson replied,

“And you as well, Dr. Preston.” Julia corrected her,

“Dr. Powell, Mother... ” Mrs. Lawson, insincerely apologized, saying,

“Excuse my mistake, Dr. Powell. Now, I would like to be taken to a decent hotel, preferably one with a suitable restaurant. Pick up my bags, Julia.” William reached down to take a suitcase. Mrs. Lawson snapped, “No. I will not have a man with a cane carrying my bag. That is unseemly. Regardless, it is my daughter’s duty.” Julia picked up the suitcases, and asked,

“What brings you here, Mother?” She replied,

“I have papers for you to sign. The attorney for your father’s estate stated that the requisite period of time had passed – that irksome provision in his will, you recall. I will finally, after ten years, receive the remainder of the trust and titles to the properties. You, Daughter, receive his shares in the company, and various patents and such... I don’t know anything about that – it is business. Oh, and there is a modest sum in cash, and sundry trinkets. We must have it signed and notarized – I trust you will not give me problems, Julia?”

“Have I ever given you problems, Mother?”

“No... However, I do not understand why you can’t make up your mind about what you want to do with yourself. You certainly

never took my advice. School teacher? Good Lord, I knew you would fail at that! You were doing so well with the piano, and then you switched to the organ. Why did you do that?"

"I like the organ!"

"The organ is for church. People do not flock to the concert hall to hear church music. On the other hand, a pretty young lady playing a concerto with dazzling virtuosity is another matter."

"Pretty? I hate that word!"

"Correctly, that is what you are. Your picture would fit well on a tin of butter cookies." William interjected,

"Excuse me, but I beg to differ! She is beautiful." Mrs. Lawson replied,

"You are her husband, so that is not an accurate assessment. When you are judged beautiful by strangers, then the opinion can be considered objective. Nevertheless, pretty has its place in the scheme of things – 'Pretty is as pretty does.'" Julia, perturbed, said,

"Some have called me a wildcat!" Mrs. Lawson laughed."

"Daughter, people jump to conclusions on an impression. That shows me that you never learned how to master the illusion of having arrived at your place. Perhaps, you are too engrossed in your own thoughts to notice that others are looking at you."

As they spoke, a steady downpour began. Mrs. Lawson looked out into the darkness, and sighed,

"See there, it is raining. I trust you have an automobile?"

"Yes, Mother." They began the long walk to the entrance of the depot. William said,

"Mrs. Lawson, allow us to offer you the hospitality of our house for your stay. We have an excellent cook." She replied,

"I appreciate the kind offer, Dr. Powell, but I am inclined to stay by myself. I would like to spend some time with my daughter

tomorrow before returning home. There is a matter that needs to be discussed, and it is an urgent one.”

Just short of the steps leading down from the platform, Mrs. Lawson took hold of Julia’s arm. She said,

“Please put down those bags. I want to tell you something... now.” After gazing into Julia’s eyes for a painfully long time, she said,

“I did not come all this way simply to attend to financial matters. There is a tumor, and it is growing. It can’t be cured with medication. The doctor gives me six months to a year at most, unless I have an operation. If it fails, I might go sooner. So, I wanted to see you for one last time...” Mrs. Lawson then put her arms around Julia, and kissed her on the forehead. After that, she turned to William, and said,

“Please promise me that you will take care of her. She is not very smart about the world, though in everything else, she excels all the rest.” Julia stammered,

“We are not staying here longer than a couple of months. Can I come help you?”

“I prefer not to say good-bye twice. Even so, if you come, understand that I will not see you when all turns for the worse. It is important to me, that you remember your mother as I am now. You should understand why it must be that way... my-my... why did it have to pass so quickly? I have a framed photograph in my bedroom. I was a girl – around 1870. It shows me hugging my little dog Beau – my picture of happiness. You must have it after I am gone.” Tears started to run down Julia’s cheeks. She asked,

“Were you ever happy with me?” Mrs. Lawson asked,

“Yes! What makes you think such things?”

After the rain slackened to a drizzle, William and Julia took Mrs. Lawson across town to the Hotel Gilridge on the Southside. It had the best accommodations, and the dining room had a superb menu. Mrs. Lawson studied the evening streetscape carefully on their

drive along the waterfront. She knew the opportunity to experience these unfamiliar sights would never happen again. She remarked,

“Charming little town... I must see the college and your home tomorrow. If you like, I will stay another day.” Julia said,

“Please do, Mother!”

“After dinner, we must discuss plans for selling the mill.” William asked,

“Mrs. Lawson, out of curiosity, why did your husband set up this ten-year trust?” In an indifferent tone, she replied,

“There are two reasons, Dr. Powell. The obvious one was that he wanted us to learn how to live within our means. That leads me to the second reason, my greed. The particulars matter little at this point. While my husband was alive, I was never satisfied with what was clearly enough. Such foolishness, it was.”

While Julia and her mother talked over dinner, William read the evening *Messenger* over coffee in the hotel café. Clearly, he understood that the conversation between mother and daughter would be constrained if he were present. So, he was resigned to bide his time, soaking up critical information about the state of the world since breakfast. What he did not find in the newspaper was any mention about Dr. White’s accident. Usually, such things were reported not long after the event. As with any small community, local occurrences – even of the trivial sort – received attention. In this instance, the college waited to inform the public. That day, William had left campus before news of Dr. White’s accident had spread. By late afternoon, the chancellor’s assistant was making his rounds to the departments with an official statement. Since there was the possibility of a lawsuit, the text was short on details. It did, however, state that the popular professor and outgoing chair of the History Department was injured in a fall, and then taken to the hospital. There were rumors floating around campus suggesting that the injuries were severe. Even so, it would be a few days before

the true extent of the damage would become public knowledge. That evening, White was undergoing surgery. Ethel would not be able to see Edward until the next day, though she would find him heavily sedated. The doctor told her that it was very unlikely that he would be able to walk again. Ethel, facing the prospect of having to attend to him for the rest of their lives together, vowed she would marry him in spite of all future travails. Liz, who had been at her sister's side through the day's heartbreaking hours, left Ethel to her thoughts after the doctor delivered his pronouncement. Mr. Dolan drove Liz home, and then returned to the hospital.

About seven o'clock, Sheriff Tate drove up through the alley behind McNeely's Shoes & Boots. There, on the landing outside the twins' flat, he found Liz alone, leaning against the iron railing smoking a cigarette. Her eyes were red from crying. She greeted the sheriff with a snuffle,

"Hello, Sheriff... Are you looking for Ethel, or me?" Tate answered,

"Something wrong, Liz?" Clearing her throat, she said,

"I don't know whether you heard this or not. The paper made no mention of it because the college doesn't want much said of the mishap until the doctors are sure. Professor White took a tumble in the rain, and it looks like he broke his back. The doctors told us that he might not walk again. Ethel is with him. I don't think she is up to going on one of your adventures right now."

"I am really sorry to hear about the Professor. Why are you here, and not at the hospital with your sister?"

"It's not my place to be there – not right now. She is still going to marry him come what may. I can't imagine it will be easy for her. Ethel is so lively and carefree by her nature."

"Does she love him?"

"Yes, Sheriff!"

"Then, don't worry. Let everything take its course."

“So... I don’t suppose you came out here to visit me? I’ll tell you, though; it would sure be nice if you did. I like adventures, too.”

“Do you like those crazy sandwiches with eggs and horseradish and whatnot?” Liz laughed, and said,

“Just because we’re twins doesn’t mean we eat the same, Sheriff. Now, how can I help you?”

“Would you like to take a drive?”

“Not really, but it sure looks like a better alternative than being by myself. I’m really sad. Can you tell?”

“I can tell. Let’s get you something to eat first. After that, I’ll take you out to see that big live oak on the county road that is decorated with lights. It will cheer you up. So, come on, Liz. Get your heavy coat.

December 6, 1921. As soon as she could leave the house, Julia drove to the hotel to visit her mother. Once again, the tension began to rise. As she made her way through the commercial district on the way to the Southside, her anxiety transitioned into feelings of loss. Mother, in time, would be gone: the one person throughout her life that stood on a solitary height, both unreachable and unmoving. Now, she came down at the end to bestow her blessings.

At the hotel, she was left waiting in the lobby for an excruciating half-hour. When Mother had made her way down to present herself in radiance, Julia was a nervous wreck. Mrs. Lawson said,

“Daughter, we must have breakfast before we make our day together. Please join me in the dining room... By the by, I hope you didn’t allow your husband to venture out lacking sustenance?”

“No, Mother. We have a cook. She prepares everything according to my instructions. Today is the first day of final exams,

so he left early, but not without breakfast. There will be a meal waiting for him when he comes home, too. I love him, and I didn't marry for money!"

"You didn't, child? I suppose you did well in spite of yourself. Come now; we will chat over coffee first."

Julia and Mrs. Lawson took their seats at a window table in the dining room. The waiter served them coffee and a dish of fruit salad with apples, walnuts, and raisins. After a sip of coffee, Julia asked,

"Mother, are you feeling well this morning?"

"Yes, there is no distress at this point. That will come later. I do not know how long my time is, but I plan to make the best of it. Are you well? It appears to me that you are a bit thin."

"Several years ago, I had influenza and pneumonia. I am sorry that I didn't mention it in my letters. Some things I do not want to think about. There was a young lady who had so much promise that assisted me. She died. I almost died... maybe; I should have. A kind lady named Mrs. Phelps nursed me the whole time. The hospital didn't have room for more. She saved my life. Since that time, I have never been able to regain my former weight." Mrs. Lawson said,

"So you say. I think it is worry. Tell me what weights on your mind. Remember, a mother knows."

"Things are not as they were, Mother. This place has become something of a tomb for us. We must get out before we suffocate. It is only one more semester." Mrs. Lawson interjected,

"One place is just as much like a tomb as another. Once you pull up roots, you might as well continue moving as long as possible. If you can, never let the world steal part of you."

"The World is mere decoration, Mother. A young man from the college remarked 'they were building another to replace the one lost during the War.' The old one, I suppose, had a good run on stage while it could still draw crowds."

“Everything comes to an end eventually. We really should not concern ourselves with that now. Don’t you want to come home?” Puzzled, Julia asked,

“Home? Do you mean that literally?”

“Yes, I mean it! Come home... there comes a time when things end. Certainly, you have done enough. There is no reason compelling you to continue to strive for something that is unattainable.”

“What is unattainable, Mother? I don’t understand.”

“You have tried one thing after another and each time the results have been crushing disappointments. It would not have been so painful if you lacked the skills. I have no doubts about your abilities. You have never failed at anything! On the other hand, your expectations of outcomes are unrealistic; and there is within your soul a tendency towards melancholy. Go no further... and come with me...”

Julia found herself drawn into this design almost as though by an irresistible current. Mother was exerting her powers – mesmerizing, clutching, and suffocating.

When Julia arrived home from her outing with Mother, she had been reduced to a physical and mental shell. Mrs. Lawson’s version of maternal love was akin to being fed cookies and stabbed with hat pins at the same time. She was a real psychological prize fighter that could dazzle her opponent with fancy footwork, and deliver an uppercut in the blink of an eye. Having pummeled Julia thoroughly in this round, she decided to extend her stay another day. After all, she had not yet visited herself upon the Powell household, or even toured the dusty nook called Special Collections where her “pretty daughter” wasted her talents on trivial concerns. Upon opening the front door to her house, she came face-to-face with a twofold shock to her already fragile constitution. There,

speaking with William in the parlor was a bald gentleman who bore a remarkable resemblance to the butcher at the grocery.

“Julia, allow me to introduce Mr. Weston Lutz, a private detective in the hire of an attorney named Ben Hollingsworth. He just arrived from Richmond.”

“Is this about selling the mill? Good Lord, William, she only mentioned it in passing – I thought – and now... No-no-no, I just came in the door!” Mr. Lutz interjected,

“Professor Powell, my presence here has nothing to do with selling a mill. As I was explaining to your husband, a client of Mr. Hollingsworth with interests similar to your own requested that a certain dispatch be transmitted to you by hand.” Julia clenched her fists, then erupted,

“Dispatch? You two sound like eighteenth-century diplomats! I’ve been with my mother all day, so get to the point, post-haste, let me hear it, ‘Know all men by these presents’ *et cetera*, sir!” Aghast by the ferocity of Julia’s outburst, William dropped his walking stick. Mr. Lutz picked it up, and handed it back to him. William said,

“Julia, you need to be sitting down for this. Do you see what I have on the tray?” He pointed to an end table with his stick.”

“Aromatic spirits of ammonia... Good Lord, I had better sit down!” Julia quietly took a seat on the sofa. William said,

“Mr. Lutz, please hand the letter to my wife. I’ll mix her tonic while she reads.” Lutz passed the letter to Julia’s outstretched hand. After studying the letter for a moment, she gasped.

“Who is she?” Mr. Lutz replied,

“Only Mr. Hollingsworth knows, and it is confidential.” Julia said,

“She will tell us the truth about the poor woman who was buried in the Potters Field. Oh, somebody saw me! ‘My friend was moved by your tears’ and oh... What have I stumbled into; and this... ‘You must keep my secret because another woman’s life is in danger!’ Oh, William! She knows me! ‘I watched you from the

courtyard working high above in the carillon. Your form was strikingly beautiful against the Sun. I wish all had continued in serenity, but my carefree heart was broken.’ William, could I have that tonic now? I’m feeling lightheaded.” William handed her the tonic of aromatic spirits and seltzer, then reached behind the sofa and produced an old bottle of brandy. He said,

“If that doesn’t help, this will... I’ve been saving it for an emergency.” He placed the bottle on the tray. Mr. Lutz said,

“As you can see, she, ‘Miss A,’ needs your remarkable skills not only to help explain the disappearance of several individuals, but to save the only person who could testify against those who are responsible for what she suspects is... well, we will not discuss that. I suppose you are questioning why Mr. Hollingsworth’s client has not appealed to the authorities. She has; and I assure you, they will act accordingly. However, ‘Miss A’ had a close friend who discovered something in an old document – she doesn’t know what – that might identify the location where the bodies are hidden.” Dismayed, William exclaimed,

“Bodies! Are you asking my wife to do something that would put her in danger?” Lutz replied,

“No, sir... What ‘Miss A’ is asking your wife to do is try to locate the document. The friend was a fellow student studying under her; though, a graduate student back then. Her name was Clara Armistead.” Julia exclaimed,

“I knew it! So, William, you said it would be best if I forget about Clara? Very well, Mr. Lutz, tell me the rest.” Without being prompted, William began uncorking the brandy. Mr. Lutz continued,

“Before Miss Armistead passed away, she transmitted a letter stating that she remembered seeing something while doing research for you. She promised ‘Miss A’ that she would write again with details. Her letter continued by saying that she was visiting a Dr. Mason at a military hospital on the weekend. She planned to volunteer as a nurse. But she took ill, and died.” Julia grumbled,

“So, if she left behind notes – and knowing her, she did – I will have to go calling on our ‘good friend’ Dr. Edward White.” Julia took a deep gulp of her tonic. “Aromatic spirits of ammonia, sir; you ought to try it sometime – steels the nerves, settles the stomach.” Mr. Lutz said,

“You do not have to do this if you prefer; but uncovering this one clue would be a noble gesture. Have you finished reading the letter, Professor Powell?” Julia looked up at him, and said,

“Why, sir?” Lutz answered,

“I have to destroy it. Such a shame; it is beautifully written, isn’t it?” Julia handed him the letter, and said,

“Yes, it is. Tell ‘Miss A’ and Mr. Hollingsworth I will help them. I know what Clara was researching at the archives, so what she found was something concerning colonial Gilridge. Now, what it has to do with missing persons or hidden burials in the present, I could not speculate. Do you have anything more to tell me?” Lutz smiled, then said,

“If we had anything more than these fragments, the authorities could solve the puzzle without your assistance. Miss Armistead was confident she had found the location. What does that mean?” Julia asked,

“And should I find it, what then?” Lutz replied,

“Here is Mr. Hollingsworth’s card. Call him as soon as you find something.” After handing Julia the card, he said, “I hope that my visit has not given you undue cause for worry. In all likelihood, for you, it will be no different than what you do normally. So, unless you have further questions, I must catch a train. It was an honor meeting both of you.” Julia said,

“And you, Mr. Lutz.” William saw Mr. Lutz to the door, and then returned to Julia. After hesitating, he said,

“There is something more. Dr. White had an accident yesterday, and he is in the hospital. Rumor has it; his back is broken.” Speechless, Julia covered her eyes.

CHAPTER SIX

December 8, 1921. During finals, Julia worked a short shift in Special Collections – noon to five. The chief librarian had allowed her to take Tuesday off to spend time with her mother. Now, it was Thursday morning. The first week was nearly done. If things had gone as she expected, the conclusion of the term would have been a relaxing slide into the Christmas Season. Then, the most unexpected thing happened: Mother came for a visit; and after several days, she had not returned home. How long did she plan to stay? Shortly after William left to go to the college, Julia heard a knock on the front door. Immediately, every muscle tensed and her heart began to race. Under her breath, she muttered, “Mother?” Dora entered the parlor, and said,

“Mrs. Armistead is here to see you, Mrs. Powell. Can I show her in?” Slightly relieved, Julia said,

“Yes! Please do, Dora.

On entering the parlor, Jane Armistead greeted Julia warmly; and then, presented her with a hatbox. In a sweet, yet pained, voice, she said,

“Julia, I want to give you this as a keepsake. It has been sitting on Clara’s dresser ever since the Sunday before she passed. Ironically, that was the first and last time she wore it.” Jane removed the lid of the box to reveal a superb example of millinery. Overwhelmed, Julia said,

“It’s beautiful! Oh, I cannot take this from you – certainly, not something like this. She gave me one of her lace-edged handkerchiefs. Even that, I feel I should return to you.” Jane placed the hatbox in Julia’s hands.

“She would have wanted you to have this, and more; and I want you to have it, too. I cannot tell you how much your visit cheered us. Since Clara passed, we have not had anybody over.

Occasionally, Dr. White invited us out to dinner, but that was the whole of it. How is the poor soul doing?"

"Other than his fiancée, Miss Rouse; a gentleman from administration, Mr. Dolan, is the only person that has been able to see him. Even so, she has been with him most of the time. He is not able to receive visitors right now. William told me he heard that the operation was successful. The doctors told Mr. Dolan that it was a freak accident. His back must have made contact with the edge of the steps, or something like it. That is all that I have learned thus far."

"I hope he makes a full recovery. He has worked so hard to preserve Clara's legacy."

"I am sure he will. Will you be in church this Sunday?" Jane sighed, then said,

"Since Clara passed, it is hard to attend church without her. When we do go, it is the early service. Reverend Smallwood does not stretch out the sermon. Perhaps, Christmas Day... I don't know. We will see... I hope you enjoy the hat. Though it is a few years removed from current fashion, it is still stylish. Don't feel shy about wearing it. Clara would have wanted you to enjoy it."

"Thank you, Jane. It will be for special occasions."

After chatting for a half-hour over coffee, Jane went home. Julia took the hatbox to her room. Before placing it in her wardrobe, she decided to take the hat out of the box. Even though she despised wearing hats, she was tempted to try this one on in front of the mirror. On removing the hat from the box, she found two slips of paper, a receipt from the New York fashion house from which Clara ordered the hat, and a receipt from the freight office."

Throughout the afternoon, Julia sat silent in her desk in Special Collections. The impact of her discovery was overwhelming. She envisioned the sequence of events clearly. On returning home, Clara visited the freight office. Having received a notice that a

parcel had arrived for her on Friday before leaving – it was written on the receipt – she waited until returning to pick it up. That is where Clara and Emma intersected. Clara signed the receipt for the parcel, and Emma filled in the rest and stamped it. Perhaps, Clara sneezed, or maybe handling the same piece of paper was enough. The parcel contained an elegant hat from New York, the one she wore to church on the Sunday she fell seriously ill. It could not have happen any other way. The receipt included the time and date that Clara signed for it, and the signature of the clerk, Emma Gales. There was the proof. Julia lacked but one piece of the puzzle to make it complete, and she knew where to find it.

Shortly before closing, Julia took the handkerchief that Clara had given her from the inner pocket of her coat, and opened it flat upon the table. It caught the eyes of a student that had been working silently on a research project since noon. Delighted by the sight of the delicate lace edged relic of an innocent age, she exclaimed,

“It’s beautiful! May I see it?” Julia handed her the handkerchief, and said,

“A student gave it to me a lifetime ago. She had many like it. She would pull them from her sleeve to dab the perspiration from her brow, eyelids, and cheeks. Sometimes, holding it in her hand, occasionally bringing to her nose and lips – the handkerchiefs were scented with drops of lilac perfume. Everything she touched smelled like it, even her papers. When wiping her glasses, she would moisten an edge with the tip of her tongue, and rub the lenses. Unfolding it and dabbing around her throat on warm days, then returning it to her sleeve...” Julia reached for the handkerchief to demonstrate. “She did thusly, as I recall; then folding it back into a little square very carefully. These dainty, scented, lace-fringed hankies were her undoing. That is a feeling, but one that I would be willing to put to the test if I could.”

“Undoing?”

“What could be more benign than a lady’s hankie? What a terrible irony. She wanted to do her part for the war effort. Like her brave friend, she was willing to put aside the comforts of home to help the sick and wounded. Had she never made that selfless decision, she might be alive today... and many others.”

“I don’t quite understand.”

“In the same way she left lilac on everything she touched, could it not be that everything she touched gave her something in return – say, the influenza germ? If you follow my movements, they end at the eyes, the cheek, the nose, the lips, and the throat. It was a warm September; and I am sure she used her hankie often as she sat in the sweltering cars. Likely, that is where she contracted the infection. It is a sad story. I keep this with me always... because she gave it to me.”

“I’m sorry...” Julia folded the handkerchief, returned it to her coat pocket, and then draped the coat over her arm. The student, seeing that Julia was ready to close up, gathered together her notes. On their way out the door, Julia told the student,

“Here is something to think about; particularly so, if you plan to spend your days in the archives. Over and again, we thought our interpretation of this fact or that experience fit together in a certain way. With every new revelation, those impressions did not acquire clarity, rather everything changed.”

At the southernmost end of town, there was an old brick building that used to be the Ballard & Harrison Ironworks. Because the company repaired ships, it had a dry dock, and a pier running out into the river. Elwood Dibble said he rented the building from Lucille Calder, and made a convincing show of repairing some of the equipment. His brother Carson boasted around town that they would have the foundry ready for operation in a year. What the brothers were actually doing was fitting out trucks with hidden tanks for hauling moonshine.

On this evening, the temperature was mild –“sweater weather” some call it. The twilight sky still contained fading streaks of red-orange light peeking through the gathering clouds. Under a broad live oak near the river, Carson raised the front left axel of an automobile with the jackscrew. He was replacing a wheel. Elwood held a lantern, as Lucille sat on a wooden tool box with her arm resting on the spare. Lucille said,

“Elwood, the revenue men are watching us.”

“I know that, Sweet Pea. As long as they are looking here, Ida will be in business.” Carson groaned. Elwood continued, “What’s wrong with you?” Lucille piped in,

“Why do we always have to clean up her mess?” Carson stood up, walked over to Lucille, and said,

“You want to give me that wheel, darling?” With an expression of disdain, Lucille lifted her arm, and let Carson take the wheel. Elwood, irritated, said,

“Listen, Lucille, we are in this to get paid – pure and simple. We don’t give a flip who’s doling out the money, as long as it comes on time. What we do for Ida and Pete isn’t a favor, and it has nothing to do with our business with you. But I’ll tell you, we have a stake in keeping you in one piece. Everything is in your head. So, be careful when it comes to poking at the devil.” In a sharp tone, she interjected,

“Yes, boys! For your sake, you better see that it remains on my shoulders.” Carson turned from his work, and said,

“I thought you were going to fix things for us. What about Mr. Leveque?” Lucille held out her hand to Elwood, and he helped her to her feet. After walking over to the front of the car, she turned to Carson, and said,

“Mr. Leveque is sending somebody.” Carson grumbled,

“Oh, Hell! That’s not what we want! Why did you have to go and do something like that? Doesn’t it bother you in the least that

Ida is kin?" Lucille slammed her hand against the hood of the car, and said,

"Hold on, boys! Leave the thinking to me, and there will be a happy path for us. Ida's handiwork is down there; and they'll find it. The law is already on her trail." Elwood said,

"Yeah, thanks to you! What makes you think they are going to stop with Ida?" She laughed, and said,

"They don't care about you! Ida committed murder." Carson asked,

"Did you see it?" Elwood interjected,

"That still leaves Pete! One way or the other, this is a dangerous game you're playing! There is a nagging voice inside my head saying, 'Run! Get away from that woman as fast as you can, while you have a chance!' That's it, and I hear it louder and more often with each passing day. You are going to get yourself killed, and we're right behind you. What do you say, Carson? Let's leave her out in the middle of nowhere, and head off to Oregon or Manitoba." Placing his wrench on the hood of the car, Carson exhaled with a groan. He wiped his hands on a rag, crossed his arms, then after a moment, he said,

"Are you two done? Well, if you're not, you need to think about a few things before dashing off to nowhere. Come the worse, all three of us go together. It will give us a fighting chance, but everything falls behind us. That means, not only letting the big money plans go to dust, but giving up our names, and everything else. You better get ready to let your boy go, Lucille; if all your scheming comes to naught." Lucille returned to her seat on the toolbox, and said,

"We have a good thing going runner liquor. That's all we want to do. It is the worse that anybody can pin on us. Mr. Leveque is offering a fair price for our services; that is, as long as Pete and Ida are out of the way. Of the two, Pete is the one that is going to get us a date with a rope, if he doesn't kill us beforehand. He is not right in the head, if you ask me. Some of those folks he put away

had nothing to do with cutting in on his business, or shortchanging him, or selling him bad liquor. He is doing it on a whim, I tell you! Do you see the boat coming?" Elwood scanned the river, then said,

"No, they're probably taking their time with this one,"

"Ida has to go, boys." Carson said,

"You know, our problems started when you looked up that girl Alice. You knew she would go to the law."

"Alice is useful, but she is an absolute fool. The first time I met her, I told her something like this: 'Why do you call them girls, when they are women? Let me tell you, because it is important. You are from the educated class. Like old money, you think the low class folks are like children – but, in a different way. While the old crowd wants to keep them in their place, just a step or two above the beggars; your class wants to improve them, but you really don't trust them. Likewise, they don't trust you... they are more apt to trust the old crowd. I'll tell you why. You come in here like a missionary bringing the plan of salvation, then after your meddling wins over a few converts and the window dressing has been changed, you go home to your college to report to the well-fed about how your meddling worked out. Meanwhile, the old crowd comes back, and then points out the familiar devils that still lurk about behind the window dressing.' We were in that Emma's room – the one she like so much – falling-down drunk! She didn't pay any mind to me – not one bit. She had to learn the hard way!" Elwood asked insistently,

"Does she know what Ida did?"

"No! She knows that I know something. I'm playing scared. That way, if the law comes down on Ida before Mr. Leveque comes through, I have something to bargain with. If that happens, you two best get started on your Canadian trip." Carson caught sight of the boat coming up to the dock. He said,

"Here he comes. It had better not have any holes this time. Got everything in the truck, Elwood?"

“The air tank is pumped up; no leaks in the hose; boots, gloves, and overalls; flashlights, trench shovels, a spindle of twine, and a coil of rope: it’s all there. Ida wants her jugs moved up the way in case she can’t use the basement. Let us finish that job before you start making a mess, Sweet Pea.”

“There is a boat tying up, Sheriff” Roth whispered.

From the opposite side of the river, Sheriff Tate, Agent Roth, and two deputies watched with binoculars as the boat docked behind the ironworks. Tate said,

“I see Lucille and the Dibble boys walking over to that contraption on rails. It runs out onto the dock. Does anybody know what that is?” One of the deputies answered,

“That’s a crane for lifting heavy things out of a boat. It is tethered to a cable for letting it down to the river and hauling it back up hill. When they get it down to the end of the dock, there is a winch on the arm of the crane that they crank to lift the load out of the boat. Also, there is a crank that allows the arm to swivel. It is old-time equipment. Gasoline motors do all the work now.” Roth said,

“What are they doing?” Tate replied,

“I don’t know. My men have been watching the Dibble boys since you arrived, and this is the first time a boat pulled up.”

Through their binoculars, they watched Elwood and Carson bring the crane down to the edge of the dock. When in position over the boat, they attached a four-cable sling to the crane hook. After that, two men in the boat attached the hooks of the sling to an unseen load. Lucille stood back, shining the old carbide lantern on the position where they were working. As soon as Elwood winched the load clear, Carson cast off the lines, and the boat pulled off full speed. Looking at a large metal cylinder hanging over the water, Tate asked,

“What do you make of that? Eagerly, one of the deputies whispered,

“It looks like a fuel tank, sir. By my guess, I would say it was three feet wide, and six feet long – it would be over three hundred gallons. That’s a good load of moonshine. Shouldn’t we be over there putting them under arrest?” Roth replied,

“We need to see where they are taking it. If you cut off the stems, new ones will sprout. You have to pull the whole damn thing out by the roots. Still, there are bigger things to go after with this one... Then again, that thing might be empty.” At that moment, the beam of the carbide lamp lit up the overgrowth in which the lawmen were hidden. Roth said softly, “Get down.”

On the other side of the river, Elwood started cranking the winch that pulled the crane back to the rear of the building. Lucille put out the lantern, and ran to a truck parked nearby. After starting it, she backed it up to the crane. Carefully, Carson guided the tank as Elwood lowered it onto the bed of the truck. Once in place, Carson detached the sling from the crane. Elwood ran to the large, metal-clad door at the rear of the building, slid it open, and Lucille drove the truck inside. After pulling the door shut, Elwood threw a switch on a box, extinguishing the lights on the rear of the building and the dock. Shortly thereafter, a light rain began to fall.

It was Thursday evening, and Mother was still in Gilridge. Victory was in sight! Julia was now more than willing to join her at the “house on the hill” overlooking her father’s textile mill. Julia would be thrust into a world antagonistic to her sensibilities – a world she feared. Furthermore, it would be hot! Montana would have to wait until the “great dying” was in full swing. She was starting to have second thoughts about leaving the college. At least, there were nearby mountains where William could entertain himself studying the streams. What was there for her? She didn’t want to be an heiress. Mother wanted to harden her into that role, a mistress of the mill lording over a shabby village. Once, she had gone out

into another mill town to teach, never hinting whose family she came from, and was treated no better than those she taught.

Choir practice was held at seven o'clock on Thursday evenings. On this particular day, there was a large repertoire of music to rehearse for Christmas. Julia and William had barely made it home from the college, when they set off across town to pick up Mrs. Lawson. She wanted to hear Julia play before she left town. The chance to do so might never come around again. On their return from the hotel, a light rain began to fall. By the time they reach the church, a downpour was under way.

"Does it always rain in this town?" Julia held the umbrella over Mrs. Lawson as they walked up the steps of the church. William, following behind, tried to hold his umbrella over his wife's head, but Mother was walking quickly. The rain rolled off it, and dripped down Julia's back. Once inside, William hung up their coats and escorted Mrs. Lawson to a pew. Julia ascended the steps to the choir loft. After sitting quietly with William for a few minutes, Mrs. Lawson said,

"Did you marry Julia in this church?"

"Not exactly, Mrs. Lawson. She was very ill, so we had to improvise. The minister, Reverend Smallwood, officiated over an informal ceremony."

"Is she well now? She looks so thin."

"Julia was sick for a long time, but much better now than this time last year. She said we will be visiting with you this summer. Would you consider a more healthful course of action? Let us say, joining us in Montana? Julia cannot continue anything you start. As much as you want, it is not going to happen."

"Dr. Powell, I am thinking about her future."

"The future is now, Mrs. Lawson. Did she tell you about a graduate student named Clara Armistead? She used to sit in this pew with her parents. In fact, you are sitting in her spot. Since Mr. and Mrs. Armistead stopped coming to choir practice, I sit here –

listening and thinking. As of late, Julia started playing regularly. It is good for her.”

“I don’t understand, sir. She said nothing about this student.” At that moment, Julia started playing. William said,

“Ah, this is my special moment. Julia plays, and nobody is here yet. When they come through the doors, they will be noisy – chattering away... the choir is singing their Christmas music tonight ... Julia will sing a little because the soloist quit. Wonderful! She started... Oh, Clara died. She sat where you are on Sunday, and was in her casket the following Thursday. Brilliant, beautiful, and just twenty-three years old... and completed two books that the college is publishing. We can only imagine her shining future. Of her gifts, there was one above all that mattered most: she had a pure heart. Julia lost a sister in spirit when Clara passed.” Mrs. Lawson turned, and placed her hands flat against the back of the pew. She said,

“Right here, you say? Should I even sit here? I have a greedy heart, you know.”

“Yes, I do, Mrs. Lawson; but hopefully, you have more than four days with your daughter – perhaps, four months or four years... Where would the two of us be today without kindhearted Mrs. Phelps? This evening would not be possible for us. The gentleman that just came in is our minister, Reverend Smallwood... Relax, Mother, and listen to the beautiful music.” Thereafter, Mrs. Lawson was consumed in deep thought.”

The lengthiest piece that the choir was rehearsing was a cantata. Julia sang an alto solo while accompanying herself on organ. While this happened, Mrs. Lawson reached over to William, squeezed his hand, and whispered,

“I was wrong.”

After rehearsal was concluded, Mrs. Lawson left William, and made her way through the departing choir members to the loft. There, she stood behind Julia marveling as she watched her gifted

daughter sight read a dazzling prelude by Buxtehude. When Julia had concluded, she wiped her brow. Turning around, she was startled to see Mother. Reflexively, she reached back to fix her unwinding bun, saying,

“Mother! What are you doing up here?” Mrs. Lawson sat down on the organ bench. Holding Julia’s hands, she said,

“I was wrong, Julia, so terribly wrong! You are beautiful!” She then kissed both of Julia’s hands, and held them close to her heart. Watching from below, William softly said,

“I wish you could see this, Clara.” At about that time, Reverend Smallwood placed his hand on William’s shoulder.

“Who is that particularly striking lady up there fixing your wife’s hair?” He replied,

“That is Mother.”

December 9, 1921. Shortly after eight in the morning, Sheriff Tate received a telephone call that there was a body dumped on the side of the road outside of town. When he and his deputies arrived at the scene, they found several men of the neighborhood waiting for them. Caleb Carter, the owner of the farm fronting the road, was at the head of their assembly. Sheriff Tate greeted him, saying,

“Good morning, Mr. Carter. I hear you found a dead fellow.” Caleb replied,

“That it is, Sheriff. The boys were getting ready to pull stumps this morning when a couple of them came on the man; dead as can be, thrown out there next the fence. I told them not to touch him, and then came inside to call you. This one looks mighty strange.”

“How so?”

“See for yourself. I don’t really have any words that could tell you better.”

Tate walked over to the body to take a look. The sight made him step back. There, before them was a middle aged man, eyes

and mouth wide open, completely stripped of clothing – his body perfectly straight. It was the eyes, however, that were most shocking. They reminded Tate of those he had seen on ice in the fish bins at the grocery store. He was not too far from the mark.

Dr. Wilson and his assistant arrived shortly after it started misting. Upon seeing the body, the coroner said,

“What in the world!” He reached down touched the man’s face, rapped his knuckles on the chest and stomach of the corpse. Looking up at Tate, he said, “Frozen solid! I’ve never seen anything like this!” Tate asked,

“How long has he been out here?”

“Not long. Maybe, a few hours... I can only guess how long he’s been dead. As outrageous as it sounds, he reminds me of a side of beef loaded off a refrigeration car. I can’t think of anything else cold enough to do this.” Tate asked,

“What would it take to get him out here?”

“He was frozen, so they had plenty of time to think about it. I’d say... they threw him off a truck, and he rolled down to the ditch.” Tate asked,

“How would one person do it without dragging... if they are smarter than average, maybe, of a superior mind?” Dr. Wilson stood up, and walked out to the road. Removing a cigar from his coat pocket, he lit it and took several puffs. Walking a few paces up the road with his head down, he mumbled to himself. Then, he stopped, turned around, and said,

“Take one of those canvas tarps that you tie over grain to keep it dry. Anchor one end down on a side of the truck; then on the other end, drape it over the other side. Don’t tie it off. Instead, take pieces of cord, and loop them through the grommets so you can tie them off to a length of board – I’d drill some holes in the board to keep the tarp taut. Then, take long stretches of cord, tie them to the board, and bring the end back to the side that you have tied down to the truck. The body goes inside the fold of the canvas that hangs

over one side – that is, in the middle, between the tie off cords.” Tate said,

“That sounds complicated.”

“No, Sheriff. It’s easy... you’re a town boy. Any of these farm hands could do it in a few minutes. Now, you can do it two ways. You can stop, untie the cord on the anchoring side; pull it through the loops, then let the tarp unfurl on the opposite end. The body rolls out. Then you pull back your cords, tie them off and go. The other way, you rig the cords so with one yank; the knots come loose. That way, you wouldn’t have to stop and get out. That’s how to do it.” Tate took a look at the body, then said,

“I can see, Dr. Wilson; you take a certain delight in the mechanism. Now, tell me this... could a woman – say, one with athletic inclinations – work this contraption of yours.” Wilson said,

“Easy... a big-city girl could do it, too. There are, perhaps, variants you could come up for other vehicles, but the principals are the same. The object is to avoid arousing attention. What made you think it could be a woman?”

“We have to consider all possibilities.”

Sheriff Tate was now thinking that somebody nearby had some fancy refrigeration equipment. He called out to Wilson,

“We need to think of these things: the temperature of the body over time, and the distance you can drive on these gravel roads. That is, over the time it took for that body to warm up to the temperature that it was when it was dumped – working back from now.” Wilson shook his head.

“That could be any time since sundown last night.” Tate said,

“Let us say, between two and three in the morning. I have a feeling that might be a good fit.”

“I can figure out how long he has been defrosting, but where he came from is little better than a guess.”

Not long after Dr. Wilson had removed the body of the frozen man, the misting rain transitioned into a light shower. It would

persist throughout the day, sometimes becoming a brief downpour. At the morgue, the coroner began taking periodic temperature measurements of the body, plotting the curve until the interior of the corpse was at a level consistent with that of an unfrozen one in the autopsy room. It would take a remarkably long time – days, but he could extrapolate the curve backwards. He estimated that the body had been stored at around zero degrees Fahrenheit in a supine position. That implied that commercial equipment – something along the lines of a non-electric hotel meat freezer – was used. That is not something one would usually find on a farm. On the other hand, if a farmer was butchering livestock and processing meats, it was a possibility. Most of the area farmers who slaughtered hogs smoked their meats. There were a few butchers and fish houses in town that had large freezers, but these businesses had plenty of employees. It would be too risky. Of course, there was Independence Ice Company located near the docks. It had the equipment, but had been closed for years. It was owned by the Littlefield family, and they were using it to store surplus metal from their boatbuilding business.

Dr. Wilson suspected it was a poisoning because the body was free of any obvious wounds.

Julia arrived at the library at ten o'clock, two hours before she was scheduled to work. Knowing that the reference section had recently added a copy of Dr. White's book, she went directly to the stacks. After pulling it, she sat down at a table and started paging through the thick volume. She was looking for chapters that referenced the material that Clara found at the state archives. Having sent her there to review the records of the colonial town council, Julia knew that the notes in White's book would reference the archive's box numbers in which these items were filed. The time range covered the period from 1740 through 1765. Exactly what Clara found that bore relevance to the disappearances that occurred prior to her death, Julia could only speculate. It either had to be an element of the natural landscape of the town that had not

changed since those times; or it was some manmade relic of the past that was out of sight and long-forgotten, say, a basement or well. She presumed that those who disappeared were murdered; so it had to be a place where bodies could be hidden; and those doing the hiding, could not be observed in the process. That idea of trying to hide a body inside the town limits did not make sense to her. It would be easier to bury a body in the woods.

Turning to the index in the book, Julia carefully scanned through each entry. Needless to say, she recognized every name and place listed. It was, after all, her area of expertise. Nothing caught her eye. After making one more pass through the book, she returned it to the shelves. As she made her way upstairs to Special Collections, she considered the possibility that Clara had uncovered something while doing research on her thesis. That was a later period, the Jacksonian Era. Clara had drawn on documents housed in the state archives for some of her research; but a significant portion of the primary sources that she referenced were located in Special Collections. Her thesis topic concerned internal improvements. For Gilridge, the state's primary port in the age of the tall ships, internal improvements meant dredging the branches of the river above the tidal head to make it easier for inland navigation, and building the railroad. There were a number of maps of the town plan made during this period. Perhaps, she thought, the answer was at her finger tips.

Through the afternoon, Julia studied the library's collection of town maps. Most were not useful. They merely showed the division of the town blocks into lots. Even so, she felt like something was missing in these maps other than the buildings. From the drawer of her desk, she removed a folder containing large photographs of the 1761 map and 1781 map she had used for her article on the mass grave. In both, the town plan included topographic features. Several streams cut through the blocks of the colonial town starting on the heights of Mulberry Hill and emptying into the river. These streams were named. Dudley's Branch snaked above the town, and then cut through the Southside down to the docks; Market Creek formed an arc around the town square – that might explain why the square is north of center; and Billy's Run paralleled Mulberry

Avenue, emptying into the depression known as the Horse Pond. So, what happened to these streams? Julia knew the answer.

The *Gilridge Herald*, the predecessor of the *Messenger*, was established in 1833, and published continuously until 1871. After it went out of business, Judge Quinley Hogg, the founder of the college, acquired the entire archive of the *Gilridge Herald* for next to nothing. He paid two dollars for eighty bound volumes and a box of loose issues. Around 1890, a math professor named Lester Stubs prepared indices to the articles. Stubs was a local history buff that spent his afternoons and Saturdays paging through the musty, fragile pages of the issues. The indices organized article titles into three volumes: a chronological index, an alphabetical index, and index of articles by topic. Special Collections had a copy of the volumes.

Julia reached for the topic index. Under the heading “Culverts”, she found a number of articles on the construction of the arched brick structures built under the streets to channel the streams. The first section of this drainage system was completed in 1810. Thereafter, the network of culverts grew as the town expanded. Work ceased during the Civil War. On average, they were four feet high, and three feet wide. Located along the downward path of the streams, they included several cylindrical cisterns that were eight feet in diameter with domed ceilings. Acting as reservoirs, they were much deeper. Iron pipes running from these cisterns fed neighborhood wells. When the streams entered the river, the flow was little more than a trickle. One of the benefits of having the streams underground was the streets were not interrupted, and they could be graded. The disadvantages of the system included gradual filling with debris and sand; and after the war, the local physicians deemed them unsanitary. By the 1880s, a pumping station upriver supplied water to the town through a system of iron pipes. Most of the old brick culverts were rebuilt and incorporated into the street drain system – except for one.

The title of the article was “Billy’s Run is Dry!” It was dated January 10, 1869. After instructing her student assistant to take

charge, Julia removed a huge antique brass key from a locked drawer in her desk. The volumes of the *Gilridge Herald* were stored in a special locked room reserved for rare and fragile documents. When inside the room, she quickly located the first volume of the 1869 issues and placed it on the massive oak reading table. Carefully she turned the delicate pages until she found the article. In short, it described how over the winter the railroad excavated an inclined plane extending ten blocks in length beginning at the river. The purpose of the project was twofold: first, to smooth the grade leading to the depot; and second, to extend the railroad docks with earth removed from cutting the inclined plane. At its deepest, the cut penetrated Mulberry hill twenty-eight feet. On order to accommodate more tracks, its width was one hundred and twenty feet. Beginning in September, train loads of earth were removed by an army of laborers. As the cut grew deeper the flow nearby Billy's Run grew weaker. Wells behind houses on the upper reaches of Mulberry Avenue started running dry. Inside the inclined plane, water was seeping through the wall of the cut. Workers had to dig a ditch to allow it to run down to the river. As the excavation grew deeper, so did the ditch. Finally, the water table collapsed. Billy's Run was diverted through the cut.

Julia was familiar with a multitude of stories about "secret tunnels" under the streets of Gilridge. Some involved pirates, smugglers, and escaped slaves. She had dismissed these stories as the product of over active imaginations. During the work that was ongoing at the town square, workers had uncovered the section she knew about. It grazed the edge of the former palisade wall. Mr. Churchill from the *Messenger* took some photographs of it. It was half-filled with sand and woody debris. There was hardly enough room to crawl. The Superintendent of Water and Sewer told the reporter that there were sections of the old culvert system in parts of the town, but most of it was removed when water pipes were installed. He continued by saying that when the streets were paved with Belgian block at about the same time, all the holes that allow access to the remaining sections were filled in. One would have to squeeze through a street drain, and then through a two-foot pipe,

to get inside what remained. He, too, dismissed all the tales. He said,

“Occasionally, we bust into one while fixing breaks in the water pipes. The air is so stale inside that you can’t breathe. Forget that tommyrot about smugglers and the like.”

Julia needed to visit the Superintendent of Water and Sewer again. Glancing through the article once more, she saw something else interesting, “The Horse Pond, greatly diminished in size since the excavation of the inclined plane, is now completely dry.” Julia returned the volume of newspapers to its cabinet, and return to her desk. After a moment’s thought, she removed the 1868 town plan from its drawer, and placed it on the table next to her desk. Following Mulberry Avenue east from the river, there was a circle north of its intersection with First Street, one block south of the depot. From observation, she knew Mulberry rises steeply to Third Street, and then levels out. On the south side of that intersection, the Horse Pond began. On this map, it covered an area of two and half blocks – containing water. At the intersection of Fourth and Mulberry, there was another circle near the intersection. At Fifth Street, the rise begins again, and then levels out at Ninth Street. Another circle was drawn between Ninth and Tenth. Then and now, the entrance to County Cemetery is on the north side. The main section occupies a square of four blocks; and Potters Field is a rectangular strip beginning at the north wall and ending at the railroad right-of-way. When the incline plane was excavated, it ended at the northwest edge of the cemetery. In 1868, that was the extent of Mulberry Street. It would not be extended until the college was opened in 1878. Presently, the entrance gate to the college on the east side of Fifteenth Street marks an interruption in the eastward advance of Mulberry. With a ruler, Julia measured the distance from Tenth Street to the top of Mulberry Hill – six blocks. On the map, a small stream began in the area where the artificial lake on campus is located, and then snaked around Mulberry Hill. It meandered eastward, passing through what would be their yard on the north side of the Thirteenth block of Mulberry. The street ended abruptly at a square in the Eleventh block. Julia thought the

square was likely the intake for the culvert. The circles could be cisterns. Placing her ruler on the map so it connected the circles, she discovered the lines did not pass through the center of the street. Instead, the line passed north of it. Mulberry Avenue was thirty-three feet wide, but had sixteen and a half feet of sidewalk on both sides. Julia knew this because it was standard in the original town plan: sixty-six feet of the public way separated blocks consisting of five lots measuring sixty-six feet by three hundred and thirty feet. If the culvert was built under the sidewalk, part or all of it might be preserved. Studying the entire map, she found a dozen scattered circles. All of them were drawn in the middle of the street.

While she was intrigued by the possibility that the bodies of the missing were hidden in Billy's Run culvert, Julia was doubtful whether Clara had actually solved the mystery. Even if it existed intact, how could one gain access without being seen – much less, haul down a corpse? It merely suggested the possibility that Billy's Run culvert might have survived the 1880s improvement projects because it was built off center and it ran dry in 1869. Was this Clara's find? Julia considered the likelihood that she might have discovered something different. There was not a direct path between the focus of research for both and the antebellum network of culverts. Julia needed to see Clara's notes. Since Dr. White was injured on the day that the publication committee gave its approval, she was certain that all of Clara's research was still in his possession. There was no getting around paying him a visit in the hospital; and at earliest, that might be a week. Only four days had passed since his accident. Then, if he agreed to see her, she would have to reveal everything from the meeting with Mr. Lutz. Nevertheless, she could make a return trip to the Department of Water and Sewer on Monday.

Throughout the day, the sky remained overcast. Temperatures hovered above freezing; and occasionally the misting rain that transitioned briefly into a drizzle made it worse. It was hard to imagine how the ideal autumn afternoon of the previous day

abruptly changed into sustained winter gloom. Mr. Roth had been out in it since Sheriff Tate left him shortly after midnight. Lucille and the Dibble boys remained at the iron works until sunrise. After that, they drove her back to Mrs. Huffman's house, and then continued up the street to their place. After a few hours of sleep, Roth dragged himself down First Street for a meeting at Sampson's Drug Store with Sheriff Tate. On reaching the door, he found Tate standing under the awning rubbing his hands together. Roth said,

"It seems like the weather can't make up its mind when it comes to this town. It was perfect yesterday; then this. Nothing changed from the time you left. After they took that tank into their workshop, they stayed there until morning. I wish we had some evidence against them. I'd like to take a look inside that building."

"While you were sleeping, we had a little excitement. A body showed up out on the county road. This fellow was stripped bare and frozen solid. I've never seen anything like it. No apparent wounds. Our coroner can't determine the cause of death until he defrosts. I wonder how long that will take.

"I can't say, Sheriff. Is he one that went missing?"

"Just off hand, I don't think so. You see that young lady coming our way?" Her name is Liz Rouse. Her twin sister helps me out from time to time – one pretty mess, that Ethel. Still, she is as sweet and big-hearted as they come. Liz is different – serious, to a degree. According to Ethel, Liz actually saw this Pete. From what I have gathered, he is the boss behind the liquor business. I think Lucille is afraid of him, not the Dibble boys. Here she comes." After introducing Liz to Mr. Roth, the three went inside the drug store for a bite to eat.

Sampson's Drug Store had a soda fountain and grill. While their menu was limited, those working in the shops and offices on the north end of First Street frequented it often during working hours. At five o'clock, business started tapering off. Today, the special was a grilled ham sandwich, vegetable soup, a piece of pie, and coffee. Though there were several tables near the window,

most patrons had their meals at the lunch counter. Otherwise, they had to bring the food to the tables themselves. Even so, the three selected a table. When the food was ready, Sheriff Tate said,

“I would be happy to get your plate, if you like.” Finding this charming, she said,

“You must like me, Sheriff. Ethel said you run her to death on an empty stomach; then wait until she is about to fall over before thinking about feeding her.” He chuckled, then said in a concerned tone,

“How is Professor White doing?”

“The doctors said he has feeling in his feet. That is all that I have heard. Ethel spends most of her day with him. She loves him, you know.”

After they had finished their meal, Tate said,

“Ethel told me that you saw this rascal Pete.” Before he could continue, she said,

“Pete is a dangerous criminal! Emma was so afraid; she didn’t stray from her usual path between the depot and the boarding house unless she was accompanied. Pete was after something she had taken from him and hid. As long as Pete didn’t have it, he wouldn’t kill her!”

“I think we found it. Did Ethel tell you about our last fishing trip?”

“No, she didn’t.

“Well, maybe not... How did you become her trusted friend?” Liz replied,

“Trusted friend? I don’t know! She worked with my sister. As you well know since you two are acquainted, Ethel is very sociable, and certainly lively. On Friday nights, all of us went out on the town... dancing and whatnot. When Professor White took a liking to me, we were not that close anymore. Ethel kept taking her out with the girls. Then, it was all over.” The sheriff, puzzled, asked,

“Let me get this straight. Professor White is engaged to your sister, but you were his favorite before that; and Emma was sweet on him, too?”

“I know how it sounds – like there might be some jealousy in the mix – but that isn’t the case. Those two are the best match.”

“I suppose so.”

“There was another man asking Ethel questions about Emma after her coffin turned up empty. He was heavy, bald headed, and looked like the old butcher at the grocery. He said he was an investigator.” Shocked, Tate asked,

“What? Why didn’t your sister tell me?” Roth interjected,

“Before you continue with that, can you tell us anything about Lucille Calder?” Liz groaned, then said,

“She is not friendly – not in the least! She is hold up in that house all day; then before dark, Elwood and Carson Dibble pick her up. I’ve been told that she is in business with those two louts ... something to do with the old ironworks. Emma thought Pete had her under his thumb, but didn’t trust her. I think she had a kid somewhere that she worried about. Say, in your poking around, did anybody say something about a college girl name Alice?” Tate said,

“Ethel told me about her. That’s another person that disappeared; though I have a feeling she is very much alive. Do you know anything about her?”

“Not much. The crowd from the college used to come to this end of First Street all the time – and some still do. As long as they didn’t wander up to the Horse Pond, they were fine. When we were little girls, it was just another neighborhood. It all changed during the war when the hoodlums moved in and set up shop. They would lure a soldier with a little money in his pocket into their den. Go up that hill, and you were in a different world. After the war, most of the bad sort moved out. Today, the whole place isn’t rotten – just dying away; and the girls that come down here to work are nice as they come – the same with those in the boarding houses. Of

course, there is Pete. People talk about him, but nobody sees him. I only saw him once, and it wasn't for long. Professor White was thrashing him. He didn't seem dangerous then. But I was afraid he might have a knife or gun!" Roth said,

"Why do you suppose that Pete didn't come after him the next time?" At that moment, Dr. Wilson came through the door carrying a folder in one hand. He grumbled,

"You're with a lady!" Throwing the folder down on the table, he said,

"There! I made a complete set of photographs and fingerprints. Don't you dare take a look – not in a place where people are eating! We will never hear the end of it! I should not have come down here in the first place. Can I go home now?" Tate said,

"What I meant was to bring them with you, but leave them in your car." Wilson snatched the folder off the table. Liz asked,

"Why does it matter that I am a lady?" Wilson motioned for Sheriff Tate to follow him outside. Tate stood up, and politely excused himself. He followed Wilson out to the street. After a few minutes, Tate returned alone. Roth asked,

"I suppose it has something to do with your latest customer?" Liz asked insistently,

"Does he dislike ladies?"

"Of course not, Liz; he apologized to you for his grumpy disposition... However, Mr. Roth, I think we are keeping the lady from attending to her sister. If Miss Ethel came home and didn't find her, she might be upset. They have had a difficult time these last few days. Once again, sir, it was a pleasure." Roth said,

"Of course... Thank you, Miss Rouse. We appreciate having you join us. Sheriff Tate, we'll see what we can accomplish tomorrow." Tate took Liz to his car. Once again, it was misting. Tate said,

"Not again... it looks like a week of rainy days this month."

"I don't mind it, Sheriff. It makes everything clean, and fresh smelling. We had better get going before it starts to pour."

During the drive back to the twin's flat, Liz rested her head against the back of the seat and closed her eyes. Tate asked,

"Are you tired?" She answered,

"Oh, yes... But it could be worse. Mr. Dolan from the college has been very helpful. He takes Ethel to the hospital, and picks her up before it closes to visitors at nine. I don't think she'll go back to work at the freight office. Professor White will need her when he gets out." Tate asked,

"How do you feel about living by yourself?" Without opening her eyes, Liz tilted her head back further, and inhaled. After a moment, she said,

"Ethel was ready to break free a long time ago. I've been expecting it. I am happy where I am."

When the sheriff arrived at the twins' flat, it was drizzling. He walked her up the iron steps to her door. On the landing outside, she turned to Tate, and said,

"The next time you come, I hope you'll take me out for a picnic in the country. Do you think you can do that?" He said,

"I'll have to meet with Dr. Wilson in the morning, but what about Sunday? Let's say, noon sharp... If it is raining, I'll take you out for a good lunch, and then we'll go driving. How does that sound?"

"It sounds very good... Good night, Sheriff."

"One thing... When I'm off duty, you can call me George. Can you do that for me?"

"Certainly, George... You had better get home before it pours. I don't want you calling in sick on me."

Sheriff Tate made his way down the steps as Liz stood watching from the threshold of her open door. She stood there

until his car turned onto Second Street. Then, she set to preparing a meal for Ethel, who was expected momentarily.

Needless to say, the gears of chance meshed on this occasion. While it rained on Sunday, George Tate and Liz Rouse enjoyed their time, and commenced their gradual drift towards becoming a match. It was not by any means something that was meant to be, for a slight misalignment would have changed everything.

December 10, 1921. Saturday was not a good day for Julia. Feeling unable to eat breakfast, she told William that she needed to return to bed for a short while before attempting to continue her routine. On returning to the bedroom, she hung thick blankets over the windows to make the room as dark as possible. Climbing into the bed, fully dressed, she fell back to sleep on top of the covers. After two hours had passed, William came upstairs to check on her. He found her sleeping on her side with the blanket pulled over the upper part of her body. Straightening it so her legs were covered; he left her to rest. Shortly before noon, she awoke feeling agitated and drenched in perspiration. This time, she went downstairs to be with her husband. Mrs. Lawson was seated across from him. Dora was serving them hot cocoa. Without waiting for William to ask, Julia said in an irritable tone,

“Yes, I feel terrible! That aside, there is something else on my mind that I would rather discuss. I am thoroughly convinced that it is impossible to discern anything more than an aggregation of disjointed pieces from our adventures into the past. I am not limiting my assessment to our present predicament! Scholars collect little fragments and cobble them together into a past that we can defend with some certainty; mind you, that the actual past underpinning our interpretations is not only inaccessible; it is too complex to be comprehended even when it happened. It is simply impossible... like one of your streams. The water tumbles, splashes, and whirls in eddies as it travels down the mountain. You might know an instant – a photographic impression – but that merely limits the probability of what you might reason happened the

instant before or after the observation!” William was taken aback by the revelation. Putting down the cocoa he was sipping, he asked,

So, the metaphysical hogwash about what is real is just an excuse for not being God?” Julia continued,

“No, William, it is worse than that! The past is not so many discrete instances that come together into a whole like the moving pictures. Currents pass on the surface, the middle, and the bottom with differing velocities and directions. There are mines floating everywhere, and some of them were placed in the flow long before we were born. Think of what happened when the course of influenza intersected our lives. You cannot claim that it happened for a purpose – though we might invent a purpose to make us feel there is a script out there written on the edges of the universe. You cannot predict what will happen because it is impossible to know all that happened before. As we have seen through our own misguided efforts, you cannot know the true nature of a person, or thing, or event, beyond the crudest sketches – and it is changeable! Anybody claiming to have a method for penetrating the background that supports the little we do know is a fool, or a charlatan.” Dora whisper to Mrs. Lawson,

“It’s nothing to worry about. She talks like that all the time.” Mrs. Lawson put down her cocoa, and walked over to Julia. William said,

“Brilliant! You need to write that down!” Julia stood silent for a moment, and then looked at Mrs. Lawson. In a dejected tone, she said,

“Mother... oh, no. Mother, I’m soaked!” Julia sat down on the sofa, and placed her hand on her forehead. After a moment, she looked directly at William, and launched into discourse.

“Truth is just a word that gives a sense of finality to an array of disjointed verifiable facts. As experience has painfully taught us, when people make up their mind that something seems plausible, albeit founded on fragmentary evidence, they are inclined to proceed as if it was actual. A whole set of actual consequences

follow as a result of their belief.” Mrs. Lawson placed her hand on Julia’s shoulder, then said,

“Child... I have decided to stay. If I am still alive in May, I plan to accompany you to Montana. Frankly speaking, I think continuing to live here is no longer good for you; the same holds true for me *vis-à-vis* the village. We are not obliged to mold our lives into a shape that pleases anyone that has the audacity to think that they know better than we... that includes your dear departed father. Now, go upstairs, refresh yourself, and rest.”

Unlike Friday, Saturday was mild and sunny. Even so, Julia was mentally and emotionally spent. As she reclined in her darkened room, her mind returned to the thought that Clara, in spite of her brilliance – perhaps, because of it – was capable of arriving at an intriguing but erroneous conclusion just as easily as anybody... including Julia. Why? Simply put, Clara was not able to make a firsthand observation. That was not merely her problem; it was a problem for all historians. William could prove his theories through measurement and experimentation, but history did not offer such opportunities. The whole discipline dealt with probabilities. Even when one has access to the records of an eyewitness, the only test of accuracy is corroboration by other eyewitnesses. Without material evidence, one could only say it was plausible that a past event occurred.

While Julia mulled over the implications of her musings, Sheriff Tate and Mr. Roth were entertaining the notion that Pete might not be real. The only person that had seen him was Liz, and had Emma not told her, she would have never known who he was. The rum runners and bootleggers knew about Pete, as did everybody in the Horse Pond; nobody could provide a description of the man, or even knew his last name. He was, as Ethel said, the Bogeyman. Repetition of his name, and retelling of his terrible deeds, gave him life in the minds of the frightened. It is easier to live with fear if it has a name.

Julia, exhausted by the relentless emotional jarring, returned to her room after having a light supper. Mrs. Lawson soon became restless. About an hour before dark, Dr. Polk invited William to join him for his evening walk. Following introductions, William told Dr. Polk that he didn't want to leave the lady visitor without company. Mrs. Lawson jumped to her feet and expressed delight in the thought of an evening stroll with two gentlemen. William was taken aback by the curious transformation in her mood that had taken place over the week, but he didn't question it. Outside, he asked,

"Mrs. Lawson, did you know that Julia likes to fish? Last summer, when we were in Montana, she would spend afternoons at this particular stream, and come home with an impressive catch." She said,

"No, sir, I didn't know that. It sounds like something that I'd like to try. Did you know; when I was a young mother, that Julia was so happy playing out of doors? We would run and play together, climbing through hills high above the town." Curious, he asked,

"Could you tell us more about young Julia?"

"Gentlemen, she was a very happy, well-mannered, and bright little girl. So much so, that my husband thought it best that we waste no time in attending to her education. Before the age of seven, she could read and calculate at a high-grade level. Then, he brought in a tutor for me." Dr. Polk was amazed. He said,

"A tutor for you, Mrs. Lawson? Why?" She took hold of the old professor's arm and whispered,

"Sir, my education was minimal. We were married when I was sixteen. He had two girls on his hands. So, after a while, we were sent off to school – two different schools." William and Dr. Polk stopped, and looked at her. William asked,

"You mean to say, he separated you?"

“That he did: Julia to a school for girls, and a women’s college for me. I, of course, being in my early twenties, had an old spinster in his hire watching my every move. He didn’t trust me being out on my own. He always trusted Julia, but didn’t visit her often enough. I guess that was my fault, yet some of the blame rest on his shoulders – he was a man, after all. I came home after a few years, clever and wordy enough to play a rule that matched my looks. Poor Julia valiantly pressed on! She was a serious student, and talented. At sixteen, she auditioned for the conservatory, and was accepted. She wasn’t home more than two months before he had to take her there. She didn’t come home often during those years; and when she was done, my little girl was a woman. After her professor booked her on a summer debut tour, she stopped performing.” Dr. Polk asked,

“Why?” Mrs. Lawson asked William,

“Does he know about her... uh, difficulties?” William shook his head, and said,

“Don’t, Mother! Grant her some dignity.” Dr. Polk interjected,

“She wilts?” William put his hand over his eyes, and grumbled,

“Please!” Mother continued,

“Poor thing, ever since she came of age, it has been the bane of her existence! She wore thick, dark, clothing to hide her gushing, but she roasted in her own juices.” William stamped the tip of his stick against the paving, and said,

“That’s enough! Tell us what happened next, Mother!” Mrs. Lawson said,

“Excuse me, gentlemen. Julia went to the university to get her Bachelor of Arts, and then tried to teach in the Common Schools. That didn’t work, so she came home crying, and her father did the only fatherly thing he knew: patted her on the head, and sent her back to school. He refused to listen to me, and told her that I had the ambition of a piece of furniture.” Polk said,

“That’s a terrible thing to say!” She corrected him,

"No, he was right. I wanted her to find a rich husband, and give me grandchildren... so I could return to playing. I was only thirty-eight at the time, and still wanted to have another one of my own. Nevertheless, it didn't work after the first time. Believe me, gentlemen, I tried enthusiastically!" William interjected,

"Mother, are you always so candid?" She said,

"Dr. Powell, do you know my first name? I wager she never told you." He replied,

"No... Come to think of it, she hasn't."

"Patience Whittaker Lawson is my full name. Stop calling me Mother! Julia can, but you're no spring chicken. Call me Patience... Good Lord, you must be ten years older than my little girl."

"I am not... Patience? I am forty-seven." Mrs. Lawson laughed,

"You're only eighteen years younger than I am; and that is about how much older my husband was when we married. Now, if you want to know how much trouble it was for me at forty-two, imagine being married to me... No, it is worse than that! Men at that age like to sit! What's Julia going to do when you get in the sitting stage – next year?" Dr. Polk came to William's defense,

"Mrs. Lawson, I am sixty-six years old, and walk several miles each day, regardless of the weather." She paused, then said,

"I am sorry..." She kissed William on the cheek, then said, "Thank you for loving my daughter. Sometimes, I get carried away. Except for the servants, I have lived alone since my husband died. He didn't trust me with money, so I never had enough to travel until recently. Even so, it puzzles me... why did he leave Julia in the same fix? She was his darling." William said,

"Since each of you agreed to cash in his life, and make your own in Montana, I suggest that you spend time fishing, and try to come to terms with your common dilemma. After a day of that, you'll be out playing in the hills like you did before somebody thought you didn't have enough sense to make your own decisions. Let me make a prediction; Julia will go back for a doctorate before

she is forty-five. When she does, it will be her own decision.” Mrs. Lawson kissed his cheek again. He said,

“Stop doing that, Patience! You’re embarrassing me!”

William and Dr. Polk continued their walk with Patience Lawson. She talked and joked all along – sometimes playfully at the gentlemen’s expense. They walked the rounds of the neighborhood; continued on to the college; and then walked the campus down to the Grove; next, they sat in the shadow of the carillon, occasionally talking with students cramming for finals; later, they returned home – at eleven o’clock. Dr. Polk was invigorated as a school boy; Patience was ready for breakfast; and William was worn out. “How marvelous,” he thought, as he fried up a skillet of eggs and bacon, “Until Sunday, she had been a stern, remote, tyrannical, marble sculpture. Was she so affected by sitting in Clara’s place in the pew that all the ice melted away? Did she experience some miraculous healing? Perhaps, it was something more explicable: for the first time in years, she realized she was free!” The aroma of bacon brought Julia downstairs. When she came into the dining room, the look on her face was beyond words – she couldn’t think of any. William and Mother, eating breakfast at midnight? After a painfully long period of bewilderment, she said,

“Mother... what are you doing?” She replied,

“I see that you are finally up. Take a seat at the table, sleepy head.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

December 12, 1921. Julia and Mrs. Lawson arrived at the Department of Water and Sewer at nine o'clock sharp. Julia told the clerk that had just unlocked the door,

"Sir, I am Professor Julia Powell from the college, and this is my mother, Mrs. Patient Lawson. Not long ago, Superintendent Johnson helped me with a research project." The clerk replied,

"Oh, I remember. You were tracing maps in an effort to find an old burying ground. The fire chief brought it up in a city council meeting after skeletons were found in the town square. The mayor said there is quite a bit of interest building; the bones appear to belong to the founders. The chief said, 'If anybody can find out about your bones, it is the lady professor from the college. She found a colonial burying ground in the yard of the fire station.' Do you know anything about the town square skeletons?" Julia answered in an uneasy tone,

"Maybe... but as you can see, it is too early for me to say anything with certainty. I am still in the middle of the research. There was something the superintendent said the other day about that old brick culvert they dug up not far from the bones – that interests me. I found something in the old *Gilridge Herald* about workers uncovering part of the old fort's palisade wall when they were building it. That set me to thinking. Do you have engineering drawings of all those old culverts?" He said,

"We will have to do some digging – yes, digging." Mrs. Lawson said,

"He is trying to amuse you, Julia."

The clerk ushered Julia and Mrs. Lawson upstairs to the records room of the engineering department. It was a long room lined with map cabinets on both sides. In the center of the room

were several book racks containing ancient tabloid size volumes that were at least three inches thick. The clerk said,

“As you might remember from last time, the map cabinets are organized into two divisions - north and south. The names of the streets in each division are etched on the plate above; the block numbers are labeled on each drawer. What street are you studying?” Julia said,

“I would like to see Mulberry, from the river to Eleventh Street.” The clerk opened the drawer labeled “Tenth Block” under Mulberry Avenue, then said,

“We will start with Tenth to Eleventh. There are six drawings in this drawer. Do you want to look at all of them?”

“Yes.” The clerk removed the drawings, and then placed them side by side on the table. After carefully examining each, she selected one, then remarked,

“This map is dated 1881. I see where the water pipe and the gas line are drawn, but there should be an intake for the culvert on the north side of the street. Do you have an earlier map?” The clerk said,

This department was established in 1878. Any work done pertaining to wells and drainage prior to that year might be found in the minutes of the town council – written descriptions, not drawings.” Julia said,

“Could I see the earliest drawing for work undertaken near the town square?” The clerk went to the drawer containing the engineering maps for the third block of Gilridge Street, and then brought it back to the table. He said,

“This drawing is dated June 2, 1882. The dotted lines running at a slight angle through the middle of the street show the old culvert. It began on the east side of the street on one end of the block, and ended on the west side at the intersection. In the middle of the next street over, Commerce Street, there is a dotted circle with the word ‘filled in’ written inside. That was one of the cisterns in the system.” Julia asked,

“So, the entire system of old culverts appears on these drawings?”

“Where water, gas, and sewer lines intersect the old culverts, the engineers map them. If they were close to the storm drains, they were incorporated into the drainage system. Still, the engineers encounter sections around town today that dogleg off center, or show up under sidewalks and easements. In the old days, the town was not fastidious in documenting this type of project. Most of the work was contracted out. Now, if it involved something that was disputable, like encroaching upon someone’s property, they would make a survey.” On hearing this, Julia’s face lit up. She exclaimed,

“Then, it would appear in the block books!” Turning to Mrs. Lawson, she continued, “The old set of block books dates back to the 1850s. We have to go to the Register of Deeds.” The clerk said,

“Before you do that, let’s take a look at some more drawings. Also, the record books contain a year by year account of the work that was undertaken.” For the next hour, the clerk pulled Mulberry Avenue drawings. The drawings were not helpful. After that, they turned to the record books. Julia and Mrs. Lawson, each taking one of the early volumes, paged through the text looking for any reference to Mulberry. As the time approached the point when Julia would have to go to work, Mrs. Lawson found an entry. Dated January 23, 1880, the report of the superintendent stated that 4,000 feet of iron pipe had been purchased to run water from First Street to Tenth Street in anticipation of building on the land formerly owned by the Central Railroad Company, including the dry pond.” Mrs. Lawson said,

“It appears that Mulberry Avenue was undeveloped prior to this time.”

“Yes, Mother; with the exception of the cemetery, the railroad owned all the land from the tracks to the town boundary on the north side of Mulberry.”

“So, who needed the culvert? The residents of the cemetery were through with drinking.”

“I have not thought to ask that question, Mother. You don’t suppose the railroad built it?”

Julia realized at that moment the reason why the culvert did not appear on the engineering drawings. If the railroad built it, then that explained why it was not under the center of the street like the other culverts. Everything made sense: the railroad would need more water daily than half the town. What she needed to do was return to the index of the *Herald* and look for extracts from the annual stockholders’ reports. In antebellum times, so many people in the region were invested in the company that the newspaper printed a summary of the proceedings. Included therein was a description of work done during the year. The state invested in two-fifths of the shares, so Julia was certain that copies of the full reports were in the state archives.

Even before Mr. Hollingsworth introduced her, Sheriff Tate knew who she was – lilac. She was the letter writer that sent the desk key.

“Sheriff George Tate, my name is Ben Hollingsworth, attorney; and this is my client, Miss Alice Cowan. The gentleman at her side is Mr. Weston Lutz, a private detective in my hire.” Tate was taken aback by the sight of the woman who he had imagined only by studying her meticulously shaped script. In dress, he was not far off the mark: a fur trimmed black coat with matching hat, gloves, and shoes. When she removed her coat, he was impressed – but not surprised – by her dress. It was black satin trimmed with a gold embroidered band of intertwined vines. The design continued on the trim of her silk taffeta turban hat. What he did not expect was a statuesque brunette with a serene countenance. When all were seated in the sheriff’s office, Hollingsworth said,

“Out of concern that Miss Cowan might be recognized if we arrived at the depot, we drove here from Richmond. December daylight is dispensed in a stingy fashion; so we would prefer to find lodgings here. Can you provide her with protection during her stay – that is, around the clock?” Tate rubbed his brow, then said,

“That is certainly possible, Mr. Hollingsworth. Does she plan to provide evidence? If this is so, then evidence against what person or persons?” Alice interjected,

“His name is Pete. I do not know his last name. Nevertheless, after living in fear for several years, I have summoned up the courage to offer my testimony.” Mr. Hollingsworth continued,

“She is willing to meet with your county prosecutor.” Alice removed several sheets of writing paper from her bag.

“I have written it down. Allow me to read it word for word, so nothing will be misconstrued.” Tate replied,

“Please do.”

“My name is Alice Louise Cowan; formerly a student at Quinley Hogg College from August, 1917 to February, 1919; now residing in Richmond, Virginia. Beginning in April, 1918, I was engaged in a charitable enterprise with my friend and fellow student at the college Clara Armistead, now deceased. Unaffiliated with any group, the aim of our endeavor was to distribute pamphlets concerning health and hygiene to poor women throughout the town, including those living in a crime-ridden neighborhood known as the Horse Pond. Miss Armistead purchased the pamphlets, and I distributed them. On occasions, a young woman who worked in the railroad freight office named Emma Gales helped me. She lived in a boarding house on Mulberry Avenue owned by Mrs. Ida Huffman. Over the months, Emma and I became close friends. From the women of the neighborhood, we learned about a hoodlum named Pete – some called him Mr. Pete – who extorted money from the residents, and enticed unsuspecting soldiers from the nearby camp to leave the safety of the public venue to venture alone into his places of vice. Once inside, they were given intoxicants laced with sedatives, robbed, and then left unconscious in the street. Individuals in the neighborhood that spoke out against Pete and his associates were severely beaten, and some disappeared. Lucille Calder, another young woman living in Mrs. Huffman’s boarding house – the two were related by marriage – was a

confidant of Pete, and Mrs. Huffman employed her to keep her books. She was, however, fearful of the man; and she was not allowed to leave the neighborhood. She told Miss Gales that she knew where the bodies of Pete's victims were hidden; and when intoxicated, described how a maid that had worked for Mrs. Huffman was murdered. Pete disposed of her body. Through her own resourcefulness, Emma secured evidence against Pete in an effort to bargain for Lucille's freedom. What she found was locked away in a hiding place; and I was given a key to hold in safekeeping since she did not trust Mrs. Huffman. In late August, 1918, Miss Gales and I attempted to engineer an escape for Lucille. Another young woman who worked in the freight office, Miss Ethel Rouse, was enlisted by Miss Gales to persuade Miss Calder to join ladies who worked in the railroad offices on their Friday night outing." Sheriff Tate stopped her, then asked,

"Did Miss Rouse know about your plan?"

"No. She was led to believe that Lucille was going to meet up with a fellow with whom she planned to elope."

"Before you continue, I must tell you that there are parts of your account that I know. You posed as Emma's sister; and when you tried to talk Lucille into coming with you, she refused. Somebody gave Emma away to Pete, but Professor Edward White thwarted his attempt to abduct her – actually, giving him a good thrashing. Then, Emma fell ill with influenza; you tried to rescue her, but Mrs. Huffman said she was going to call the law on you; and shortly thereafter, Miss Gales died. What happened next?" Alice folded the pages, then said,

"Very well, sir, I will tell you. I drove home without telling a soul when Mrs. Huffman threatened me. Not long after arriving, I fell ill. In November, I received a letter from Mrs. Armistead telling me that Clara had died. Included was a note for me in Clara's hand that she never finished. I have it here." Alice removed a small note from her bag and handed it to the sheriff. After reading it, he returned it to her. Alice continued her narrative.

“When I returned to the college in January, 1919, I learned that Emma Gales had died. The ladies that worked for the railroad told me that she was buried in Potters Field.” Tate interjected,

“Do you know anything about the disappearance of her remains?”

“No, sir... but I have my suspicions.”

“Would you like to share them with me, Miss Cowan?” Mr. Hollingsworth stopped her, and said,

“Sheriff, she doesn’t know. Please allow her to finish.” Tate nodded; then Alice resumed.

“I tried to help Lucille escape a second time, but she backed out at the last minute. I met her after dark behind the warehouse near the railroad tracks on Second Street. After she left, I returned to my automobile. Pete came up on me from behind. On cranking the engine, I felt the barrel of a revolver pressed against the back of my neck. Commanding me to get into the car, and grip the steering wheel as tight as I could; he sat down in the back seat with the gun trained on my head. ‘Drive’ Pete said. Leaving town, I continued on the county highway until I reached a dirt road leading to the river. Halfway, it turned into a path. ‘Stop the car, turn off the engine, then get out’ he said. At that moment, I realize that my death was moments away. Much to my surprise, Pete said, ‘Take off your coat, jewelry, and shoes; place them on the seat.’ He asked me whether I had anything else on my person that was valuable. I told him that I did not. At this point, he took a length of cord from his pocket – thin, like the pull cord from Venetian blinds, but very stiff. ‘Hands behind you’ he calmly said; then tied me, cinching the knots each time he made a loop around my wrists. From the minute Pete put the gun to my head, I knew that I was the next person to disappear. Every second, I was planning my escape. It was a moonless night; the darkness proved to be my ally. Holding my arm, he marched me down to the river. I could tell it was darker than he expected by his searching steps. Releasing my arm, Pete removed a trench lighter from his pocket. When he attempted to

light it as he walked, I tripped him. He dropped his revolver when he fell. I kicked him repeatedly in the head and face with my foot, and then pushed his gun out of reach. When he tried to lunge at me, I sidestepped him; then quickly slipped into the woods fronting the river. Stopping and listening, his clumsy footsteps gave away his position – as did his cursing. When he was moving away, I could concentrate on the knots. It was very difficult not only because the stiff cord would not give; but there were three strands, each redundantly tied. After freeing my hands, he didn't have a chance of catching me. I kept up the chase, hoping the thug would continue injuring himself in the darkness. It was easy to elude him: he was in poor shape, and as I was told, given to intemperance. I am athletic. Then, it seemed like he gave up. I waited silently in the undergrowth until morning twilight before trying to make it back to the road. When I emerged from the woods, an open field stretched out before me. There was Pete, staggering around, shivering, with his clothes ripped to pieces. I ducked back into the woods, and made my retreat quickly along the bank of the river. On the way, I came upon Pete's revolver next to a pine tree. I picked it up. Retracing my steps eventually brought me to the clearing where my automobile was parked. Carefully, I circled it, ready to fire at anything that moved. Nothing; he was not there! Without hesitation, I raced through the ritual of cranking my car; all the while, clutching the weapon. As soon as the engine had turned over, I maneuvered the car so it was facing the road. Emptying the bullets from Pete's revolver, I threw it into the woods when I reached the county road. Then, I kept driving." Sheriff Tate opened the folder on his desk, and selected a photograph from inside. He said,

"Miss Cowan, judging from your story, I assume you are not one who is inclined to shock at the sight of the grotesque. Am I correct?"

"I suppose not." Tate handed her one of Dr. Wilson's photographs, then asked,

"Is this Pete?" She gasped, then said,

“That’s him! I am sure of it!” She handed the photograph back to Tate. He replied,

“We found him out on the county road, stripped down, and frozen solid. Our coroner determined the cause of death was a subarachnoid hemorrhage. A blood vessel in his brain burst, and he likely died shortly thereafter. It was a natural death. There was not a scratch on the body. That tells me that he was alive long after he tangled with you. Still, I think we need to visit that landing again. You are not the first person that described it. I would like to find Pete’s gun, if it still out there. It would help support your account. It might come as a surprise to you; the story of your disappearance has made the rounds in the Horse Pond. Why have you waited until now to come forward?”

“Lucille needs my help!”

“How did she know you were still alive?”

Alice told Sheriff Tate about the newspaper clippings that she received in the mail concerning the disappearance of Emma’s remains. She assumed they were from Lucille. After mailing the key to the sheriff, Alice realized she had insinuated herself into the investigation. She secured the services of Mr. Hollingsworth. He, in turn, hired Mr. Lutz. Lutz came to Gilridge to gather information about Emma for the purpose of determining whether any good would come from revealing more of Alice’s story. While asking questions about town, Lutz discovered that there was a professor from the college that was visiting Emma’s grave. Tate asked,

“Was it Dr. Edward White?”

“No, Sheriff. It was Professor Julia Lawson Powell. I took several of her courses. On the other hand, Emma’s friend from the freight office, Ethel Rouse visited her grave every week.” Sheriff Tate shook his head in amazement, then said,

“Miss Cowan, for several days, I have entertained the notion that Pete was not a real person. His terrible presence existed only in the minds of the local criminal class and their victims. If, indeed, he

is stretched out in the morgue having been preserved in the deep freeze for who knows how long, there is a plot behind it. Somebody wanted us to find him. Contrariwise, somebody was equally intent on concealing his death. Why, in that fashion, is beyond me. Adding to the stew, there appears to be an organized effort to lure well-meaning amateur sleuths, and do-gooders such as you, into the mystery. The clues that result from this meddling lead nowhere. There is another person that I know who claims to have encountered Pete; and I intend to show her this photograph, along with some others from the files of the coroner. I hope she can verify your identification of this fellow. That aside, your description of his pathetic physical condition matches with what she told me.” Hollingsworth interjected,

“So, you believe my client is a pawn?”

“I do. All of us are pawns. This afternoon, I will confer with a gentleman representing the government’s interest in this conundrum. Has your client been talking to them?” Emphatically, he answered,

“No.”

“Somebody is... I hope you plan to stay around for a while. If Miss Cowan desires the protection of a deputy, I will be more than willing to oblige. There is a fine hotel on the south side of town where she will be comfortable. From what I gather, her purpose in being her is to put an end to the sordid career of Mr. Pete. Am I correct?” Hollingsworth said,

“Yes, that; and I might add, Miss Cowan is concerned about the wellbeing of Lucille Calder.”

“I am working on that, sir.”

That afternoon, while closing up Special Collections, Julia heard the bells of the carillon. It was a chromatic scale ascending slowly three octaves. She rushed down the stairs leading to the main stacks, and out the door into the courtyard. William and his volunteers fixed it! She walked out to the Grove to wait for him.

When he arrived, he said he hoped that Julia would agree to play it after the commencement ceremony. Mother – rather, Patience – likely wanted to hear it, too. William still marveled at the energy that the supposed dying woman had brought to their household. She was vivacious, witty, and outgoing. The neighbors fell in love with her, especially Mrs. Phelps. They were so much alike, not only in appearance, but in personality. Julia seemed to enjoy being with her mother, but William could see how his wife was becoming exhausted by the constant activity that Patience thrived on.

When he came upon Julia in the Grove, she was sitting on the bench, gazing into the pond. She said,

“I have a feeling that the Indian woman died here. That is such a horrible thought. Someday soon, everybody will know.”

“Knowing, Julia, will not change a thing. The Grove will not be transformed into a cemetery, and students will still enjoy its delights. Maybe, they’ll weave the story into the lore of academic mystique? Perhaps, someday they will erect some sort of monument to commemorate the victim of the villainous act? That seems appropriate. Time will tell... are you ready to go home? Patience is probably up to mischief.” Julia laughed, then said,

“She is running me ragged!”

“I hear she took Jane Armistead out on a walk the other day. It seems to have proven beneficial. If I heard correctly, they were planning to do something today as well.”

“Yes, William, you heard correctly. My mother is drawing her out. She plans to walk with her to church this week.” William replied,

“That is what she said.”

When Julia and William arrived home, they found Patience entertaining a visitor, Sheriff Tate. After introductions, the sheriff said,

“This morning, I had a visit from Miss Alice Cowan, her attorney, Ben Hollingsworth, and a private detective named

Weston Lutz. It is my understanding that you have a talent for finding ancient bones. Our fire chief is quite impressed – in fact, so is the mayor! He is anxious to meet the celebrated ‘bone lady’ to discuss the town square skeletons.”

“So, the mayor refers to me as the ‘bone lady’ in public? Good Lord, what a reputation! Obsequiousness aside, sir, I assume more pressing matters prompted you to make this visit. Please take a seat.”

Julia explained how she was attempting to discover what her deceased assistant may or may not have discovered, drawing upon no other clue than knowing the scope of different research topics that she and Julia had undertaken in 1918; not to mention anything either one had stumbled upon along the way by chance.

“Also, there may or may not be notes that might illuminate Clara’s direction, but they are in the possession of the unfortunate Dr. Edward White” she added.

Her objective, as the sheriff knew, was to find out where Pete had hidden the bodies of his purported victims.

“Clara”, Julia stated, “thought she had found the location; or Miss Cowan had thought Clara found it. Even so, whatsoever she found, it could not be anything more than an educated guess. If the site existed, and it was suitable for hiding corpses, there was no part of her method that included verification. That is, unless she took it upon herself to visit the site; and I am certain that she did not.” Sheriff Tate’s mind reeled as he was pummeled with potentialities. He said,

“So, while groping around in the dark, did you find anything?” After pausing for a moment, she said,

“What I have found might not be the same location – keeping in mind the aforementioned. Nevertheless, if intact, it would serve well for the purpose of a concealed crypt or abditory. When the railroad was completed in 1843, the company built a brick culvert to divert a stream called Billy’s Run to supply water to the depot and machine shops. In 1869, the culvert ran dry after excavation

for the railroad's inclined plane collapsed the water table. This is when the Horse Pond dried up. They installed a pump and water tank; then put down iron pipe to the depot. The ends of the culvert were covered up, and the land through which it ran was eventually sold in the 1880s. The culvert does not appear on any of the drawings at the Department of Water and Sewer because it was built on land belonging to the railroad. I plan to examine the block books at the Register of Deeds in the morning; then examine the deeds for any reference to the culvert." Tate asked,

"How did it work?" Julia said,

"Two cisterns served as reservoirs on its course. I assume that pipes or brick channels led to the depot property. If these were covered over, one could tunnel from a basement into the culvert. Please understand what I am saying is hypothetical. If the culvert is intact, it might be as it was left. Archival research has its limits. You will not know until you dig a hole." William interjected,

"If I might add a word, let me suggest something simpler. Take an iron rod and drive it into the ground where you suspect the culvert is buried. When it strikes the brick vaulting, you will know you are in the right place. After that, start digging." Tate rubbed his forehead. After thinking for a moment, he said,

"Before the town will allow me to start digging holes – even on public property – I need strong evidence that links doing so to the investigation of a crime. The Department of Water and Sewer has sufficient cause to go looking for it, but not my department. I am afraid we have reached another dead end." Julia said,

"Sheriff Tate, how many persons have gone missing?"

"Rumors abound there is at least a dozen; yet, for lack of witnesses, none." Startled, she exclaimed,

"None? You, sir, are also groping around in the dark. When you put aside the rumors, the remains of Miss Gales are verifiably missing." Mrs. Lawson interjected,

"Verifiably missing? Are you sure?" Tate said,

“No. When we unearth the coffin, I pointed out to the coroner that the breaks in the wooden lid looked fresh. He told me that the absence of decay residue inside suggested the body was taken out not long after burial. The break, he reasoned, must have occurred recently, as a result of the wood giving way under the weight of the dirt.” Mrs. Lawson added,

“Perhaps, there is another explanation, Sheriff. My daughter told me that Potters Field was unattended. Let us suppose that someone intent upon making a stir excavated a hole not far from the actual grave, put an empty pine box inside, covered it, and then moved Miss Gales’ marker to that plot. My friend, Jane Armistead told me that her campaign to have the poor woman removed to the main cemetery took months; and on many occasions, she published notices in newspapers around the state asking relations of the deceased to come forward. That, sir, offered sufficient time for potential deceivers to act. Perchance, are the graves in Potters Field mapped out?” Tate replied,

“I suppose so. I have never had cause to ask. Even so, I do not believe this was a prank. If you are correct, something or somebody was taken from that coffin. The culprit could not risk it being discovered.” Julia said,

“See, Mother, this is how the World works. I didn’t realize it until we spent time watching mountain streams last summer. There might be one stream, but many currents flow through it from bottom to surface. I am now convinced that apprehending the enormity of the present is beyond the scope of human understanding and an *actual history* is impossible.” Patience rolled her eyes, and then whispered to the sheriff,

“They do this all the time.” Julia turned to William, and continued,

“Think of how many times the ground has fallen out from under our feet! Each time, we have drawn the logical conclusion from limited evidence, only to see the whole come crashing down when something new comes to light. If we can fail, only a fool can

claim to know the scheme of things with certainty.” William replied,

“Julia, it is all randomness, chance collisions, and probabilities.” Turning to Tate, he asked, “What do you think?”

Sheriff Tate politely excused himself from the discussion by saying he had several places to go that evening. Before leaving, he told Julia that she would likely receive a visit from Alice Cowan sometimes soon. He could not say when because Alice, out of concern for her safety, did not want anybody to know her movements in advance.”

After several days of watching Lucille and the Dibble boys, Charles Roth observed nothing that would provide sufficient cause for a judge to grant a search warrant. Saturday, several additional revenueurs arrived in Gilridge to assist Roth. They took up their stations on River Street within sight of the ironworks. That afternoon, the agents observed that one truck driven out of the building had acquired a fresh coat of dark green paint. Monday morning, Carson brought a newly painted sign out of the building and put it on the bed of the green truck to dry. It read ‘Dibble & Calder Salvage’ in perfectly formed roman type. Elwood worked inside the shop during the afternoon, occasionally sliding open the large metal doors to drive in another one of the several trucks that were parked in the yard. To the casual observer, it appeared as though the brothers and their lady friend were working around the clock to open a legitimate business. When the three were not inside the ironworks, they were at home in their respective places of residence. When Sheriff Tate joined Roth at his lookout point on the river opposite that ironworks, the federal agent voiced his frustration.

“Sheriff, this section of your state is awash in moonshine; our informant said those boys are tending the spigot! Tell me, how they do it without leaving that building?”

“Maybe, they have a hidden passageway? I had a nice conversation with a professor from the college this evening. They call her the ‘bone lady’ because she has a knack for finding skeletons buried around town - unfortunately, ancient ones. She thinks she found an old brick culvert the railroad built back in antebellum times. It stretched a full ten blocks or more.”

“Intriguing, Sheriff; but what does it have to do with us?”

“The young lady you met this afternoon, Miss Cowan, set the professor to work looking for the place where Frosty Pete could have hid the bodies of his victims. With nothing more than intuition, she found an underground structure forgotten for forty years. I don’t think there is anything down there, but I would like to satisfy my curiosity. From her description, it runs directly through the yard of the boarding house where Lucille Calder stays. It sounds like a handy place for hiding moonshine.”

“Are there more of these old culverts around town, Sheriff?”

“Fragments are scattered about in the old section of town; but not out here. All of this was marsh in those days. But there is another thing on my mind: while I was speaking with Professor Powell – the ‘bone lady’ – her mother suggested that I was tricked from the very beginning. It was all sleight of hand! The creator of this conundrum bated my path with factitious clues that obscured the actual crime.”

“I am not following you, Sheriff.”

“She suggested that the remains of Miss Gales might still be in Potters Field. Tomorrow, I am going to look into that. Still, there is more to her idea...Here is a case in point: we are watching the ironworks; confident that our three suspected rum runners are inside; knowing that there is no way they could leave without being seen; but we are thoroughly convinced that they have devised a way to come and go with ease. We assume that they know somebody is watching their every move. A few days ago, a boat delivered a three hundred gallon tank. We assumed it contained moonshine... What if they are unaware of being watched; and the activity in that building is legitimate business, not a charade? Are you sure your

informant pegged the right boys? Elwood and Carson Dibble are mechanics by trade, and their family ran a livery in town for generations. True, there were a few times that I had to haul them in – brawling, public drunkenness, and a host of other minor infractions. They may very well be involved in the liquor business, but they have too much to lose by getting in so deep the work poses dangers. As for Lucille Calder, in spite of the suspicious secondhand descriptions of her character, she has never been convicted of a crime in this state... Maybe, we should be watching places rather than people?”

“What places do you have in mind?”

“A while back, I arrested a young man who ran liquor out to a speakeasy. He picked up his jugs at a wooded landing upriver. Pete took Miss Cowan to the same place. But the more I think about it; that would not be the ideal place if he intended to kill her. Pete was taking her to meet a boat. At least, that is what I think. When there, he would give a signal; his associate would come ashore, and take the woman. She said he was trying to strike up a trench lighter. Maybe, he had a lamp hanging out there? Let us go out there in the morning.” Roth chuckled, then said,

“Pete, the all-seeing, all-knowing, unexpected dealer of death from all corners: that, Sheriff, is tragic commentary on human nature. He was more folktale than man. In life, he was bested by a chivalrous history professor and a high society amazon.” Tate jibed,

“Not just her! Don’t tell me that Lucille was afraid of that! If she couldn’t take care of him, the Dibble boys would!”

“Sheriff, you need to show that nice young lady we were chatting with the other day those photographs of ‘Frosty Pete’, as you call him. We need a second identification. Maybe, a few more of his acquaintance will pay the coroner a visit.”

“I will, Mr. Roth. The coroner is getting aggravated by my delays. I am sure that the folks that put him on ice are getting nervous, too. Before any of that, I have to take a visit to the

cemetery; after that, I'll have to drop in on my friends at the railroad."

December 13, 1921. On Tuesday, Ethel returned to work. Increasingly, she found waiting around the hospital too stressful. The doctor assured her that Dr. White was recovering, but he needed rest. Most of the time, he was too medicated to carry on a conversation long. Even so, he was lucid for periods; during these hours, Ethel was given instructions on how to attend to various concerns pertaining to his home and correspondences. He granted her use of his Packard *Twin Six* even though she had only recently learned how to drive. Lastly, he told her that she was not obligated to spend her entire day watching him sleep. She decided to work during the day, and visit with him in the evening. Shortly after eleven, Sheriff Tate came through the door at the freight office. On seeing him, Ethel frowned, and said,

"No, Sheriff; I am not going to do it! This has been a taxing time for me. Before all this, the only pressing thing on my mind was having a good time; and now, after being worked-up for this long, I'm about to go crazy! If there's one thing I can tell you, this is so strange to me that in just a moment, the clock will start ringing, and I'll wake up!" Tate interjected,

"Ethel, we know where Emma might be! That means, she will get a proper service and be laid to rest in the main cemetery. There is more news. I will tell you all about it after I meet with Mr. Coleman. By the way, I need your assistance this afternoon."

"Will you give me two sandwiches – you know the ones – and before we start, because I don't want to fall over? I mean it! Without fail, every time you enlist me in one of your quests, I get dragged around all creation, up and down steps, and over railroad tracks, back and forth, out and over, without proper nourishment!" Announcing to her fellow workers in the office, she continued, "Ladies, you better fill your bag with candy bars when this man takes you out and about!" Tate interrupts her diatribe, saying,

“A bag of sandwiches, and candy bars... big chocolate bars! What do you say?”

“Done!” She called out, “Mr. Hines, the sheriff is taking me into custody again!”

Mr. Coleman was not particularly pleased to see Sheriff Tate, but was more than happy to pass him off to the superintendent and chief engineer of the company, Jonathan McNair. While the sale of the railroad’s land on Mulberry occurred prior to his tenure, McNair had heard stories from some of the older employees in the early 1900s that said a brick culvert ran under the land that was sold. From what he understood, it was designed by the first chief engineer of the company, Major Johnston; and unlike the town culvert, it was constructed to higher standards. Johnston, a professional civil engineer, made drawings of all work to be done, so McNair expected they were stored in the company record department. It did not take long to retrieve them.

When McNair and Tate spread the set of twenty-six meticulously inked drawings on a table, they were amazed. The culverts were six feet tall and four feet wide. The cisterns or “reservoirs” as Johnston labeled them, were fourteen feet square and made of stone. Excluding their brick barrel roof, they were twelve feet deep. As Julia suspected, the water supply for the railroad branched off the cisterns at a right angle to the downhill flow. These branches were smaller than the principal culvert, and contained iron pipes. The overflow drained into the river through the last stretch of the system. The intake at the head of the stream was fitted with an arrangement of two separate iron grills for catching woody debris and leaves. There was a trap for collecting sand. McNair marveled at the expertise that was employed in its design. For Tate, it gave him exact locations and depths for the components of the entire system. While much higher than the land on which the railroad built its facilities, it ran deep in the bluff overlooking the river. Johnston wanted to maintain a two percent grade the entire length.

By comparing the drawing to a map of the extended docks at the end of River Street, McNair discovered that the outlet was now buried beneath the new land. The smaller culvers leading from the cisterns to the depot were covered by the embankment created when the railroad cut the inclined plane. A stone retaining wall held back the embankment. Likely, the company removed the iron pipe before the land was sold, but there was little reason to believe the culvert system was dug up. Likewise, those who purchased the property had no reason to move it because it ran a safe depth. McNair told Tate that he had every reason to believe that the culvert system was intact, but could not see any way it could be entered easily.

The ominous sustained rumble of the 16-foot diapason echoed through the old parish church. It was the first note – the lowest “C” in the pedals – of the *Fantasia & Fugue in C minor* by J.S. Bach. Though it was early morning, the church was quite dark with the stained-glass windows providing the only illumination. Julia, having decided to postpone her visit to the Register of Deeds until Wednesday, wanted to practice before going to work. Patience sat on the organ bench beside Julia, turning pages. She said,

“Your hair is falling, dear. Where is your hat?” Without interrupting the piece, Julia replied,

“I’m messy, Mother. Now, listen to this: over the sustained “C” in the pedal, this motif appears in the soprano voice, then imitated in the alto, followed by the tenor...”

“Julia, what do you mean by soprano, alto, and tenor? I don’t understand.”

“That’s the *tessitura* of each voice – terminology for the range of voice lines on the keyboard. Forget about singers... I don’t know when I’ll ever play this again. Christmas is my last day... Listen, Mother! Now, “G” in the pedal! “G” is the fifth, the first overtone, above the fundamental “C.” The whole piece shifts into “G” minor... see the “F-sharp”... here the motif returns.”

At that moment, there was the sound of a door opening in the sanctuary. Patience looked down, then said,

“The minister is down there with a tall, dark-haired lady. See, she is wearing a nice hat.”

“Mother, I’m not wearing a hat. This is not a church service; it’s practice... besides, I don’t like hats. Please turn the page!”

The minister took the lady to the center aisle. They stopped, and looked upwards to the choir loft. Julia said,

“Now, back to ‘C’ minor, but it will end on a ‘G’ major chord – the dominant – then; wonderful things happen, Mother! Oh, it is so wonderful!” Patience said,

“They’re watching us. I best straighten your hair.”

“No! Bach doesn’t care... and... “G” major chord... you feel that something is coming... on the principal chorus with mixtures on the “Great” manual.” Julia sings and plays the notes of the fugue subject when it appears for the first time. She then continues playing. Patience whispers,

“Good Lord, Julia! It’s like... I don’t know.” Uncompromising and relentless, the fugal voices came together forming a magnificent architecture. It was something much larger than the actual walls could contain – a big idea. When Julia approached the entry of the chromatic motif of the middle episode, she said,

“And now, it soars, Mother --- (singing) --- ‘G’-‘A-flat’-‘A-natural’-‘B-natural’-‘C’-‘E-natural’-‘F-natural’-‘F-sharp’-Glorious!”

As Julia continued to play, unalloyed delight beamed from her countenance. On the return of the subject, she signaled Patience to add a heavy reed stop to the pedal as they had practiced; and then came the unsettling ending cadence from a “G” major seventh chord to a “C” minor cord. On finishing the piece, Julia turned to Patience and said,

“This is how it ends! You are set to hear that jubilant “C” major chord, but just the opposite happens.”

“Why is that, dear?”

“Sometimes, Mother, we need to be dashed against the wall like a rag doll by our own expectations.”

“You think too much, Julia.” At that moment, Reverend Smallwood entered through the choir loft door accompanying Alice Cowan, Patience said,

“Reverend, have you ever heard such music?” He answered,

“Mrs. Lawson, it is more than that. Great music is a glimpse into what is behind all things; and before your daughter started playing for us, I could not imagine music such as this written by anybody... But if you were to ask me whether I like it; I would have to tell you that it leaves me dumbfounded, and even, a bit frightened – and in awe! It is very deep.” Patience said,

“My daughter is very deep, but very good in all respects.”

Smallwood agreed, and mentioned how lucky the congregation was to have such a gifted organist. Then he introduced Alice,

“Professor Powell and Mrs. Lawson, this is Alice Cowan. She has come to request an interview with you.” Julia said,

“Now, that I see your face, Alice; I recognize you. It is my understanding that you have come to help the sheriff find the remains of the young woman taken from Potters Field?”

“Yes, Professor Powell... She volunteered her time to help the poor women of the town with us during the war years. She was doubly wronged in death... and there are other matters.” Patience asked,

“I gather that you were friends with Jane Armistead’s daughter, Clara?”

“Yes, we became very close before she died. I miss her terribly.” Julia said,

“I would like to talk with you at length about Clara. She was such a kindhearted young lady, and so brilliant. My husband knew

her well – that is, going back to the time when she was a little girl. Even so, we are discovering that there were so many sides to her that escaped our observation. Only recently, we learned about her creative gifts; and now, though true to her character, philanthropy.” Patience interjected,

“Can you come to dinner this evening?”

“Yes, I can. I hope that you might not mind if Mr. Weston Lutz accompanies me... and there will be a deputy parked outside your drive as well. His name is Fred Wilkes – very much the perfect gentleman. Presently, he is waiting outside by the car; and Mr. Lutz is guarding the front door. I regret being unable to travel freely about town without my protectors, but a prior unpleasantness makes it necessary.” Julia said,

“Do not worry about that. We are always happy to see Mr. Lutz.”

After a brief agreeable conversation, Reverend Smallwood then took Alice back downstairs. Patience asked in a hushed voice,

“She is my height, and very beautiful.” Julia closed the book of music, and then placed it in her lap. Turning to face Patience, she said,

“I feel heartbroken, Mother... The most profound creations of the human mind are at our fingertips, and it is our good luck that Providence has given us time to explore them. All the time we have been given to get to today – from playing in the woods above the mill village to ascending to these dizzying heights of the mind was more than enough. It could all end today, and both of us would go to our graves satisfied. Nothing that we strived for was ever impeded by want... only our frailty. It is only by chance that we are here... that we have the privilege to think. However, if we dig deep enough we will find something ugly below. Pondering the cost paid by others for our self-determination, it makes me feel ashamed to be a human being.” Patience sat down on the organ bench, and placed her hand upon the book in Julia’s lap. She said,

“The Reverend told us that this gave him a glimpse into what was behind everything, and he found that frightening. I think he is mistaken. It is not frightening... it is what it is, and there is no more. Likewise, you can feel heartbroken and ashamed, but there is nothing behind it – a lifeless void that will draw you in and consume your soul.”

“Mother, are you sure you want to waste your time with me?”

“Since coming to be with you, no longer do I look to the past to find happier days.” Julia sighed, then said,

“That means so much to me.”

After providing Ethel with an ample supply of goodies, Sheriff Tate handed her a long measuring tape on a spool and a pad; then, the two walked from the freight office downhill to River Street. It was a quarter of four. Curious about his earlier statement concerning the remains of Emma Gales, she asked,

“Where did you find Emma?”

“From what I could tell this morning, she is in Potters Field. Somebody dug a hole four feet to the left of her grave; then put in a crude pine box like they have at the morgue. They busted the upper part of the lid to make it look like grave robbers took the body; filled in the hole and smoothed it out; and then they moved her marker. Also, the rascals took a marker from another row behind, and put it at the head of her real grave. That’s what it looks like, but it might be something else. So, Ethel, we were hoodwinked. She was there all the time. You know, that place is so neglected, they could have done it in broad daylight, and nobody would have noticed... except you. How come you didn’t notice?”

“The grave was sinking. I told Mr. Littlefield, but he said those thin pine boxes fall to pieces. Then he told me that the gravediggers would take a load of dirt out there to level it. Still, it felt like there was something different, but I couldn’t think why. Will they move her like they said?”

"I don't see why not. But I don't want you saying anything about it just yet."

"Not me, Sheriff!"

"I know... it appears you're good for that." After coming to the intersection of Mulberry and River, Tate looked at the pad, then said,

"According to the old drawings, the outlet for the culvert should be fifty-two feet from the center of Mulberry. So, that is thirty-three feet public road, and nineteen on the old railroad land. Take the end of this measuring tape and go out to the center of the road."

"Sheriff, you want me to stand in the middle of the road? What if somebody comes barreling down the hill and hits me?"

"Very well, you take this end; I will stand out in the middle of the street." To this, she said,

"No, we measure from the curb thirty-five feet. That is, fifty-two minus seventeen then subtract sixteen - seventeen plus sixteen is thirty-three. Fifty-two minus thirty-three is nineteen." The sheriff puzzled over her calculations for a moment, then said,

"What?"

"I will stand on the curb, and you will measure out thirty-five feet. Now I know why you want me around when you go on these adventures. You need me to make the thinking easier for you. It never ceases to amaze me how you can come through the door, say 'Mr. Hines, can you spare Ethel for a little while?' Every time without fail, he lets you do it. It makes me feel like I'm a pencil. 'Mr. Hines, can I borrow a pencil?' Nobody worries much about lending a pencil. Most of the time, they don't think twice about getting it back."

"Ethel, please hold the tape." After measuring out the distance, Tate called Ethel over to the place where his measurement ended. He said,

“Beneath our feet, six feet down, is a brick culvert. It runs under the hill up to First Street in a straight line rising two feet for every one-hundred. That means it is about twenty feet down at the top of the hill. This is about as close as it gets to the surface. Do you see a good place where somebody could dig on down there and break into it?”

“Break into what, Sheriff?”

“A culvert – It’s a tunnel?” Ethel looked around. Beginning at the measuring point, she paced out a line running across River Street towards the water, very slowly. Carefully, she surveyed the ground beneath her feet. Continuing to the bank, she walked out on the pier. Kneeling down, she took off her hat, and she peeked under the pier. Then, she stretched out flat on her stomach, grasped the edges of the decking, and thrust her head out below the railing. Unsatisfied with the view, she said,

“Sheriff, I think I see something.” She crawled out from under the railing, sat up; took off her coat, placed her bag aside, and started unlacing her shoes. Tate asked,

“What are you doing?”

“I’m going to hang over the side. I want you to hold on to my ankles so I don’t go tumbling in head first. I think I see something under the pier, at the end of the bank. It looks like a notch cut into it. But I need a better look. You wouldn’t happen to have a flashlight with all that stuff you tote around.” Tate handed her his flashlight. After turning it on, she took a case from her skirt pocket, and placed her glasses inside. Resuming position on her stomach, she said,

“Hold on tight! I am going to hang over at my middle.” Once able to view under the deck of the pier, she trained the flashlight on the river bank below. She said,

“There is a notch dug into the bank of the river about a yard. Inside, there is an opening. It looks like an archway. Part of it is under the water. Pull me up. I want to take a closer look. After climbing to her feet, she gathered up her possessions, and wrapped

them in her coat. Leaving the pier, she hid her bundle in one of several lengths of iron pipe stacked on the ground. Tate was curious as to what she intended to do. She walked to the bank of the river near the pier, and then glanced underneath. After rolling up her sleeves, she said,

“Sheriff Tate, you had better not drop me in! Do you see that piece of concrete sticking up out of the water? I want you to take my arms, and lower me down on top of it. Don’t let go until I get my footing!”

“Wait a minute, Ethel! I don’t want you to do that! You could get yourself hurt!”

“No, I won’t! You’re going to be looking out for me. Besides, you’ve made it so that I’m so worked up about seeing what’s under there that I just might go back out on the pier and jump in! Now, let me have my adventure!” Placing her fists on her waist, she gave Tate a hard stare. After tightening his lip, and shaking his head, he said,

“Ethel, you are going to get me fired! You know that, don’t you?” She said,

“Take my arms.” Against his better judgement, he took Ethel’s arms and reluctantly lowered her gingerly onto the slab of concrete four feet below the retaining wall of the river bank. Then he handed her the flashlight. After carefully looking under the pier for a long, silent minute; she stepped off the concrete into a patch of sand. Her feet sank ankle-deep. Tate said,

“Where are you going, Ethel?” She replied,

“Lower yourself down here, Sheriff. You need to see this...” Ethel reached for one of the pilings holding up the pier, and then waded into knee-deep water. She exclaimed,

“It’s freezing!” No sooner had Tate heard her complaint; he scrambled down the retaining wall. Ethel was quite a bit more daring than expected! He was beginning to regret having enlisted her in this reconnaissance.

As Ethel waded under the pier, the water became deeper. Her skirt was wet up to her knees. When she reached the notch, she was waist deep. It did not deter her from advancing to the opening within. Elated, she cried out,

“Sheriff, I found your tunnel!” As she approached the entrance, the water became shallower. She stepped inside. By this time, Tate was a few feet behind her. He said,

“Hold right there!” Joining her, he took the flashlight, and shined the beam into the dark passage. For as far as he could see, there was about two feet of water. Ethel said,

“I’m freezing! Do you feel the air?” Cool air was rushing in from the surface of the river. Tate said,

“There is another opening up there. Walking forward a few steps, he felt unevenness beneath his feet. After handing the flashlight to Ethel, he reached down into the water. Immediately, he withdrew his hand, and said,

“We need to get out of here!” Without hesitation, he placed his hand on his revolver. Taking Ethel’s arm, he rushed headlong back into the river. This time, not bothering to follow the water’s edge, they waded waist-deep the way back. After returning to the concrete slab, Tate took Ethel by the waist, and roughly hoisted her up. Then, he followed. Jumping to his feet, he said,

“Get your things, Ethel. We need to get back up the hill. That damn December sun is setting.” Without bothering to put on her shoes, Ethel walked briskly alongside Tate until they reached the rear steps of the railroad administrative building. Once there, she haphazardly slipped into her coat, put on her hat, and then rubbed her arms vigorously. Though it was only pleasantly cool, she was shivering and her toes felt numb. Even so, she was unwilling to ruin her shoes by placing them on her muddy stocking feet. After catching her breath and taking a chocolate bar from her handbag, she asked with a thrill in her voice,

“What was down there?”

“There were tracks under the water... for raising and lowering a cart, I suppose. Do not say anything about this!”

“Not me! Well, if you don’t mind, could you walk me to the car? I need to go home and change before seeing Edward. Besides, I feel so cold that any minute now I’m going to freeze into a solid block! I would appreciate it if you explain to Mr. Hines why you kept me so long.”

“Don’t worry about that.” Ethel peeled open the chocolate bar, and took a bite. Then she said,

“That was exciting! When are we going back?”

Julia finished her duties in Special Collections for the term at two-thirty that afternoon. This was the last day of finals. Aside from commencement on Saturday, she was off until the second week of January. Having time before William joined her, she attended a brief reception for retiring faculty in the Alumni Hall that adjoined the library, followed by a tea. While there, the chancellor said, “Professor Powell, you are indeed a fitting representative of our institution. Few members of the faculty project your confidence and serenity. None are as fastidious in their deportment and dress as you.” The chancellor’s remarks were gratifying, and she perceived that they were authentic. By a quarter after four, Julia excused herself so she could meet William on the steps of the library. The cool fall air was invigorating – fall was her season. Her graceful cool weather attire was the source of great enjoyment for her. Having Mother around, and coming to know her for her true character, was changing how she viewed herself. For the first time, she felt elegant, and the compliments she received alleviated the self-consciousness that her condition created. The only thought on her mind that gave her cause to doubt was the underlying pangs of heartbrokenness that she described to Patience. This evening, Alice Cowan would give her a hitherto unknown glimpse into Clara’s last year. Deep down, Julia sensed another painful revelation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

December 14, 1921. Following his adventure with the intrepid Ethel Tuesday afternoon, Sheriff Tate retrieved a changing of clothes from his car; then went immediately to the Railroad Hotel to speak with Roth, soaked from the waist down. Tate was convinced that the culvert was being used for smuggling in moonshine; or maybe, it was being accumulated there. After hearing this, Mr. Roth was sufficiently convinced he needed to shift his attention to the opposite end of River Street. The only thing he found discouraging was that the water under the pier was so shallow that only a flat-bottom boat could maneuver between the pilings to the opening. This suggested that a small amount of liquor was dispensed from this point. Even so, the site was worth watching. Roth placed a telephone call to Mr. Coleman's home, occurring at the moment the attorney was sitting down to dinner. He refused to return to his office. Roth and the sheriff had to come to his house. The negotiations took place in his library.

On seeing Tate's notes about the drawings, Coleman produced a topographic map of the town, and proceeded to correct the sheriff's geometry. The length, according to Major Johnston specifications, was 4,225 feet, descending from an elevation of 92.5 feet above the level of the river. Unlike the railroad's inclined plane which had a shallower grade, the culvert was close to the surface nearly most of the way from the river and the cemetery. Under First Street, it would be about eight feet down; at Fifth Street, where the elevation approached fifty feet, the culvert would still be about eight feet below; and at the head, it was seven feet. The sheriff's original impression that it was buried deep under First Street was erroneous. Likely, the steep rise of the bluff from River to First had deceived him. The grade followed the average decline in elevation closely. There were only a few places where the culvert was deeper. One could dig down to it easily in many places. Coleman argued that the section running under the walk outside the south end of the railroad offices was buried deeper than most

places, save the rise to the terrace at Sixth Street. Nevertheless, if the section that remained under railroad property was being used for illegal activities the problem was more complex. He insisted that the railroad detectives be informed about the progress of the investigation, and stated that they must be notified when they planned to enter the section under railroad property. Reluctantly, Roth and Tate had to sign a document to that effect. In all, Mr. Coleman was aggravated by the prolonged duration of the investigation.

Shortly after midnight, Sheriff Tate and Mr. Roth met the night watchman assign to the administrative building for the railroad. After several aggravating hours of trying to persuade Mr. Coleman to grant permission for the lawmen to use the building as a vantage point to surveil the pier, Roth was allowed use of the clock tower above the entrance. The structure extended twenty-four feet above the peak of the roof; and where the bell was housed, it was open to the air in all four directions. Above it, four clock faces projected outward from a pyramidal roof. To gain access to the tower, one had to climb a spiral staircase located behind a locked door at the end of the second story hallway. While the view from the tower was the best position for observing the pier on River Street, Roth found it uncomfortably breezy. Out of sight on the river, two of his agents watched from a boat hidden beneath the railroad's wharves. His other two men were still watching the ironworks.

During the first night of watching the pier, Tate kept Roth company for an hour. After that, he went home to get a little sleep before having to go to his office at nine o'clock. Roth and his men continued the watch until daybreak. Nothing occurred at the pier. At the ironworks, Elwood Dibble drove a second freshly painted truck out of the building at sunrise.

Julia awoke at three in the morning. Her conversation with Alice Cowan after dinner left her feeling more heartbroken than she admitted to her mother. Alice told of a letter that Clara received from Emma Louise before the latter took ill and died. Her best

friend was tormented by guilt for having fallen in love with Clara's fiancé. She described in the letter how she would often share her feelings with other nurses when they were off duty about what she termed "my act of betrayal." After agonizing over this confession for several weeks, Clara penned a letter to her granting forgiveness. Further, she told Emma Louise that she would not stand in the way of her happiness. No soon had she posted the letter, she learned that Emma Louise had died. Alice said that Clara was overcome by remorse for having delayed her response. She said that fate would punish her some day for her selfishness. It was after that, Clara started helping Alice with her charitable work with the poor women. When Frank was killed, Clara contemplated suicide. Though she was no longer in love with him, she viewed his death as a punishment for having stayed safely at home while her companions had volunteered. At this point, she decided following in the steps of Emma Louise.

After Alice returned to the college in January of 1919, she paid a visit to Jane Armistead. During their sorrowful conversation, Jane let Alice read a letter she had received from an Army doctor. Clara had visited a military hospital about 120 miles up the track from the town to volunteer as a nurse. Dr. Mason, now working at a hospital near Petersburg, described the well-dressed attractive young woman vividly. He talked with her at length, and gave her a tour of the hospital. She spoke with some of the nurses, and gave several recuperating soldiers chocolates. When Clara failed to arrive for her training, the doctor called Mr. Armistead. On learning that she had died, he was overcome by a deep sadness that returned every time she came to mind. The doctor said the image of the sweet lady passing out chocolates to the sick soldiers was etched into his mind; and lamented, "She would have made a fine nurse. Fate is cruel."

When Dora arrived to prepared breakfast, she found Julia curled up on the sofa in her nightgown with her face buried in a cushion. Shortly thereafter, two of William's students arrived just as he was coming down. He had invited them to breakfast, and then they would go looking for a Christmas tree. On seeing Julia asleep

on the sofa, William closed the parlor door. Patience told William that she wanted to come along on the tree hunt.

Liz was out on the landing smoking a cigarette when unexpectedly, she saw headlight shining through the alley. Immediately, she recognized the sound of the engine. It was Sheriff Tate's heavy automobile. Quickly, she put out her smoke, and flicked the butt into a flowerpot on the landing. After locking the door, she descended the steps to meet him, straightening her hair as she went. He called out,

"Want to go for a ride?"

"Yes, George! I'm closed up, and ready to go."

She ran around to the passenger side, climbed in, and said,

"I was just thinking about you."

"Liz, I can say the same. Let's get going. There is something I need to talk to you about. Just relax, and let me say my piece.

"No, George! I do not want to look at any more photographs of dead men. I told you which one was Pete; I am as positive about that as I'll ever be."

"I am not going to show you anymore photographs. We don't have to worry about Frosty Pete anymore. This is about something else. Promise you will not say anything. Now, I'll start by saying that I trust you most of all because I want to marry you."

"Yes!"

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, George, I'll marry you!"

"Did I just propose?"

"Yes, you did! I sure hope you meant it!"

"I did. I wasn't quite ready with my proposal, but it is the truth. Well, we'll get back to that in a minute. This is about Ethel."

“What has she done now?”

“It is nothing like that, Liz. I want to employ her in my department.”

“As what?”

“I’m not sure, yet. I recognize that she has a gift for figures, and figuring out things. The other day, she uncovered something for me that would have any one of my deputies – and me – searching a long time.”

“You mean the day she came home drenching wet with mud on her feet? What is with you, George Tate? You treat her like one of the fellows!”

“No, I don’t! She is like a hound on a sent when she gets started. I think she is cut out for something other than working in an office. Besides, before I started taking her along, she was sleuthing on her own. That’s what she was doing when I caught her in that speakeasy. It is not going away when she marries Professor White.”

“Professor White needs her more than you do! What about me? Where did you get the idea that we were as different from each other as night and day? Do you think that I want to work in Mr. Fischer’s dry goods store? I declare, you are something! And don’t compare my sister to a dog! This is like out of a dream! How in the world did I fall in love with you so fast?”

“Remember, you asked me to come by and see you... not once, but two times over. You said it as if you were serious. That meant, you were thinking about it longer. Then everything fell into place. Am I right, Liz?” After contemplating this for a moment, she said,

“You’re right... but why do I get the feeling that Ethel likes you more than she should?”

“That is not the case. She has restlessness... and something is driving her. ”

“Encourage her at your own peril. Now, let’s drive out again to the big oak they’ve dressed out like a Christmas tree. There, you can propose to me in a way that I’ll remember. After that, I want to talk about a wedding.”

December 15, 1921. Julia and Patience began the day early in the archives of the Register of Deeds. Mr. McKay, recalling Julia’s last visit, frequently checked in on her. He asked her whether the room was too warm; did she need a glass of water; and should he assign a clerk to help carry the heavy deed books for her. Each time, she thanked him; and then said in an assuring tone that she felt perfectly fine. Otherwise, her research progressed rapidly.

In the early block books, Julia found the old culvert penciled onto the inked drawings. Every block from the river to the cemetery was owned by the railroad; the exception being a strip of land fronting the cemetery gates. This, too, had the culvert penciled in. After searching the grantor index, she discovered that the two blocks from the east side of First to the west side of Third were sold to a land speculator. Looking at latter block books, she found by 1893 that the First Street side of the block from Mulberry to the depot was divided into small parcels owned by businesses. The same held true for both sides of Third Street. The north side of Mulberry on these two blocks contained long closely spaced lots. On Second Street, there were two large lots owned by businesses. She determined that the culvert ran under the corner businesses and residences as far as Fourth Street. Continuing from the east side of Fourth Street to the cemetery, she found the names of individuals and couples inked in five uniformed parcels per block. Obviously, this was residential. Driving this part of Mulberry often, she knew that the houses were set back from the road. The culvert more than likely was buried under the front lawns. The strip of land in front of the cemetery was, not unexpectedly, purchased by the county for addition to the cemetery. Her work was completed before noon. After lunch, Julia and Patience paid Sheriff Tate a visit.

“Nearly all the structures on Mulberry from First through Fourth are built over the culvert. Beyond that, it would be beneath the front yards of residences. That is, with the exception of the cemetery. As you can see by the tracings that my mother made from the block books, the cemetery was extended to Mulberry. Presently, the walls are near the road. If we place these two sheets of tracing paper over each other, the intake for the stream occupies the place where Mr. Littlefield has his office.” Tate said,

“I saw the drawings for the intake. It was an impressive piece of engineering. The stream water flowed into a deep pool, and the opening of the intake was near the bottom. I suppose all of it was filled in. The minutes of the board and the cemetery account book would show what work was done.”

At that moment, Tate started to mull over all the strange aspects of his investigation. Many involved the cemetery. If there was any mischief going on there, Mr. Littlefield would know about it... or be involved with it. After looking closely at the tracings, he asked,

“Do you have anything else for me, Professor Powell?”

“Yes, I have something that might interest you. The large three-story house on Mulberry with the porch that wraps around the sides has a basement. It was built in 1902 for Captain John Huffman, a shipbuilder and land speculator who purchased all the land on the north side of Mulberry to Third Street. By this time, the county required building permits. While I have not had time to visit the office of the Building Inspector, it appears to me that the cistern on that block could easily be incorporated into a basement. Before Prohibition, it would have made an impressive wine cellar.” Tate added,

“As you can see by my notes, your research overlaps nicely. Just off hand, we can place the cistern under the left rear of the house. Of course, I must ask you about the next one.” Taking another two sheets of tracing paper from her portfolio, Julia laid one over the other. She said,

“That parcel belongs to Belfort Dibble.”

“Yes, Professor Powell, I am familiar with the family. The brick building on that lot is a machine shop. Belfort used to build wagons and carriages in the old days; now his business is repairing trucks and automobiles. His sons are trying to get the Ballard & Harrison Ironworks up and going.” Julia interjected,

“That, too, was once owned by the late Captain Huffman.”

At that moment, there was a knock on the door. On opening it, Tate saw Deputy Wilkes with Ethel at his side. Surprised, Tate asked,

“Ethel, what brings you here this morning?” Mr. Hines was told to replace me; Mr. Coleman sends his regards; and Liz said you have a job for me.” After rubbing his brow, he said,

“Ethel, this is Professor Powell and her mother, Mrs. Lawson. Mrs. Rouse is my... assistant.” Julia said,

“Oh, we’ve met. Miss Rouse is Dr. White’s intended. How is he doing, dear?” Ethel replied,

“When not asleep, he is uncomfortable, grumpy, sarcastic, and demanding. The doctor thinks it is a good sign that he might be on the mend. His toes move. Thank you for asking.” Tate said,

“Well, Professor Powell, I would like to offer you payment for your work – professional compensation, so to speak. Furthermore, if you find it agreeable, could you continue for another day or two? There are a few things remaining that might progress quickly with the application of your expertise.” Mrs. Lawson said,

“I’m sure she would be happy to do it. She has nothing to do except entertain me since the term ended at the college.” Julia looked at Patience, then said,

“Yes... I have nothing better to do than entertain my mother.” Tate said,

“Miss Rouse will assist you. You’ll find that she is very good with figures, and other difficult tasks.” Julia said,

“Very good... tell me what you would like for us to do.”

“I would like for you to find out about Captain John Huffman – his will, death and marriage certificates, and property transactions. Did he and his wife have children? Is there any business or familial connection between Captain and Mrs. Huffman and the Dibble family? Can check the cemetery boards records in the county courthouse so we can see what happened to the intake for the culvert?” Julia, somewhat taken aback by this list, asked,

“Is there anything else?”

“Yes, I would like a complete list of everybody who has an interest in the ironworks and the Independence Ice Company.” Ethel said,

“Don’t I need to fill out some paperwork first?” Tate pulled a card from his desk, and handed it to her. He said,

“Fill in your particulars front and back; give it to Deputy Wilkes. While you’re doing that, I have a standard contract for services that Professor Powell and Mrs. Lawson need to sign. Don’t dillydally, Ethel.” Patience laughed, and said,

“Thank you, Sheriff Tate. Now, I can say that my education appears to have led to some gainful employment.

A brief notice appeared in the morning edition of the *Messenger*. “The frozen corpse found on December 9 has been identified by creditable individuals as a person of unknown estate and occupation called by the name ‘Pete’. The cause of death was determined to be natural. To date, the remains are unclaimed. The criminal investigation connected to the improper disposal of his remains is ongoing.” Continuing, the notice stated that the remains would be buried in Potters Field at three o’clock that afternoon. It was not the only activity occurring in Potters Field that day.

Dr. Wilson had received official permission the previous day to unearth the grave of Emma Gales to verify the presence of remains. There was, however, a condition that was required by this

order. Upon verification that the coffin contained the remains, and there was no evidence suggesting they had been disturbed, it had to be reburied. The reason stated in the order was that the purpose of the excavation was exploratory and within the context of an investigation. The possibility that the grave was empty would cause additional grief to well-wishers, namely, Mr. and Mrs. Armistead. Consequently, the proceeds were kept secret.

Dr. Wilson was concerned that the coffin could be damaged during the reburial, so he instructed the carpenters that worked in the county shops to build a large box of thick boards into which he could place the small coffin containing Emma. At ten o'clock, the gravediggers began the work of excavating the grave. When the coffin was brought to the surface, it was found to be intact, showing no signs of having been disturbed. When it was opened, Wilson recognized the remains of the white cotton hospital garb in which she was delivered to the morgue. What continued as her form was bent - the result of being put into a coffin that was too small. On seeing this, the otherwise unflinching coroner felt genuinely remorseful. He openly apologized for having treated her so callously. After taking the necessary photographs to document his findings, he and Mr. Claymont closed the coffin and placed it gently into the larger coffin. By noon, Emma was returned to the grave; there to rest until the next event in her postmortem career.

The gravediggers reopened the false grave next to Emma. This was where Frosty Pete would abide. Sheriff Tate's addition to his name, however, did not stick. In the registry of the indigent, his name was listed as "Pete" with the note "unknown white male, approximately thirty-five years" written in small script. He, unlike Emma, was fitted with an old suit that dated back to the turn of the century. Since Emma, he had changed his thinking about the residents of Potters Field.

At three o'clock, just as Mr. Littlefield was preparing to read the brief scriptural passages from the approved card, an automobile pulled up to the gate. Out of it emerged two distinguished looking gentlemen, and a tall, elegant lady. It was Alice Cowan, Ben Hollingsworth, and Weston Lutz. They were not there to pay their

respects; rather, on the insistence of Miss Cowan, their purpose was to gain a sense of finality. Sheriff Tate, fresh from his meeting with Julia and Patience, arrived shortly thereafter. With all gathered around the grave, Mr. Littlefield began his reading again. Then the gravediggers set to work. Sheriff Tate introduced Miss Cowan to Dr. Wilson and his assistant, and then asked whether he had some good news. Wilson said he was legally bound not to reveal his findings to anyone outside of official circles. He could only say that the results were satisfying.

After visiting Clara's grave in the main cemetery, Alice and the gentlemen that accompanied her began their drive to Richmond. Sheriff Tate told Wilson that he planned to post a deputy outside Potters Field for a few nights in the event that somebody came to visit Frosty Pete.

As the workday was drawing to a close, Julia, Patience, and Ethel examined the will of Captain John Frederic Huffman in the archives at the county courthouse. As Ethel took notes, Julia summarized the text.

"The devisees include Ida Littlefield Huffman, wife – she received the house on Mulberry Avenue including the adjoining land, outbuildings, accoutrements, and appurtenances, the personal effects of the deceased, two-thirds of the cash in the bank and shares of stock in sundry corporations except those of the Huffman Steam Ship and Boat Company and the Ballard & Harrison Ironworks – Claud Peter Huffman, son, and Lucille Calder Huffman, son's wife – they receive one-third of his cash holdings, shares of stock, and the Ballard & Harrison Ironworks including all shares, the adjoining land, buildings and outbuildings, accoutrements, and appurtenances – Alvin Littlefield, business partner – he received shares in the Independence Ice Company, and his shares in the Huffman Steam Ship and Boat Company including so forth along with proceeds from the operations of said business from the moment of said John Huffman's death." Patience remarked,

“His wife has the same surname as his business partner.” Julia said,

“The caretaker at the cemetery is Norton Littlefield. I wonder whether the two are related.” Ethel said,

“There is a lady – about mid-thirties – that stays with Mrs. Huffman. Her name is Lucille Calder. Emma Gales knew her. Do you know about Emma?” Julia answered,

“Yes, we do. Tell us about Lucille.”

“She is a strange one, Professor Powell – keeps to herself, and not very friendly. She doesn’t work during the day, and nobody can say much about what she does at night. She goes out every night with Elwood and Carson Dibble, and comes back grimy like she has been working with machinery. The girls say that she is crazy.” Patience interjected,

“It looks like we are coming up on five o’clock. Where should Miss Rouse meet us in the morning?”

“Let us resume our research at the Register of Deeds. There we can look up the birth, death, and marriage certificates for these sundry individuals where each is applicable.”

Ethel arrived at the hospital at a quarter of six. When she entered Edward’s room, he was propped up on a chair. The cast immobilizing his body from his waist to his under arms forced him into a rigid posture. He was reading from a typed sheet of paper to Mr. Dolan.

“The most serious element in the ancient moral code pertained to the protection of the wife, or the wife and her children. Kierkegaard struck at the heart of the problem with his examination of the story of Abraham and Isaac. Clearly, murdering one’s son to demonstrate devotion to a deity is problematic. The deeper one looks at the scenario, the worse it gets. The happy ending doesn’t matter. What does this have to do with our present notions about marriage? The ancient code is preserved within

them. The couple is duty-bound to honor, love, preserve, and protect each other and their offspring above all. Religion, politics, capital, and other extrinsic concerns have to sidestep the usurpation of natural loyalties. Placing intangible notions above the interests of the family is dishonorable regardless of whether church, state, or employer requires it. In the South, they call it chivalry: best defined as a flexible system that had an antebellum origin, but became germane as it diffused into the wider culture during Reconstruction, and thereafter. Even a ruffian could lay claim to being a gentleman if he maintained a healthy respect for women and children. Protecting them earned him heroic status regardless of his station.” Ethel took a seat, and listened quietly. Edward handed Mr. Dolan the sheet of paper, and said, “Yes, the edits work nicely. Who will be delivering this paper in my absence?” Dolan replied,

“The symposium is still a month away. If you are not able to deliver it yourself by that time, we will seek a volunteer from the faculty at large. The final approval is ultimately in your hands.” Edward, at this point, saw Ethel sitting at the far end of the room. He said,

“Ethel, how are you doing today? Were you listening?”

“Yes, it sounds wonderful! Are you ready for my report on the wider world?” He answered,

“That, I am.”

“Today, you received five letters: three were bills, one was from Mrs. Armistead – I assume it was a card – and a letter from your father. I have them in my bag. When you are ready, I will prepare the checks for you to sign. The gardener placed the Christmas tree in the living room. I plan to decorate it on Saturday in anticipation of your return the following week. I hope the doctor still intends to let you come home by Christmas?”

“He does... What about you?”

“Sheriff Tate hired me on to work in his department. I suppose he was testing me when he needed help with this and that.

What I've noticed is that he is very good at telling others how to do something that he can't do himself. He is not good with numbers. By the way, the frozen man was Pete, the soldier you thrashed for manhandling Emma back in the days. They buried him in Potters Field today. That is what the sheriff said. He also hired Professor Powell – the one they call the 'bone lady' – to dig into wills and land records. Her mother, Patience Lawson, is helping – she is very lighthearted and full of energy! I was assigned to take notes for them. Now, I know what a codicil is! Do you know them?"

"So, the sheriff paired you with the 'wildcat' librarian?"

"She doesn't seem much like a 'wildcat' to me – very serious, and a bit sarcastic. I guess her mother keeps her in line. She wanted to know whether you ran across a note in all those Armistead girl's notebooks. It concerned something underground – a secret place where bones were hidden."

"I think I like 'bone lady' better – it is a better fit."

"That's mean spirited!"

"Very well, Ethel, I assume that Julia has become maniacal about some mystery connected to this insignificant place. I have told her time and again to focus her abilities and insight on larger topics. Enough, I will not get into that... Clara had two lined books of notes in black cloth binding, full size – about an inch thick. Most students use cheap pads; Clara had to have something special. Her handwriting was small, perfectly straight, and clear... Every entry is dated, and she recorded where she was at the time. I have never seen anything like it. They are on the table in my study. Take them over to Julia; when she finds the entry, return them to Mrs. Armistead. Tell Julia, I still want her to consider teaching at least one course in archival research. Since I am unfit for other work, I have withdrawn my resignation." Elated, Ethel said,

"Does that mean we can stay here, Edward?"

"I hope that suits, dear?"

"Yes, it does! Liz is getting married!"

“To whom?”

“Sheriff Tate proposed to her, and she accepted. He took her out under the big Christmas tree on the edge of town, and gave a beautiful speech. She was reluctant at first, but Liz finally gave in. It sounded so sweet when she told me. Still, our story is better! Do you want a chocolate bar?”

“So, my brother-in-law is going to be the sheriff, and my wife will be his employee? I sure hope he doesn’t get you two mixed up. Yes, I will have a chocolate bar! What else do you have in your bag?”

“I have two more chocolate bars, some cookies, one stick of peppermint, three soda crackers wrapped in wax paper, and a can of sardines. What would you like?”

“Could you leave all of it?”

“Certainly, Edward; whatever you need, tell me!”

Dr. White dismissed Mr. Dolan and the nurse. Alone, the two shared Ethel snacks while engaging in cheerful chatter about nothing. After they finished, Ethel asked in a serious tone,

“Liz said that I should become educated after we are married. She thinks that I am smart enough, but those folks you work with will look down on me. Do you think it is possible for me to enroll in the college?”

“If that is what you want, but don’t do it because of what you imagine people will think. Julia Powell has done nothing but live her life in school. She has degrees in music, mathematics, and history. It did not make her happy.”

“You’re right, Edward; she strikes me as being sad. When I first met her, she was with her husband. He is just the opposite – almost jolly. Well, they say, opposites attract.”

“Who are they?”

“The almighty ‘they’ that seems to have an answer for everything.

“Are we opposites?”

“No... If you grew up around the corner from me and worked as a switch operator or freight car-man, we would have fallen in love. Liz thinks it was all spur of the moment, but it’s not true. She liked you, so I wouldn’t dare... never to my sister! But when she said we were a better match; I told you how I felt.” Laughing, Edward said,

“Yes, you did, Ethel! You gave me an ultimatum! You put me on the spot. After you did your little dance, I was convinced it was you and no other.” Ethel giggled, but then returned to a serious tone.

“Tell me... Who was Clara? You are here because of her book. In the scheme of things, was what she had to say so important?” Edward pondered her question long, frequently rubbing his legs. Then he said,

“She was very much like Julia Powell in many ways. Both were born into privilege, and were allowed to pursue their potential. She is an unintentional intellectual snob; or perhaps worse, a hypocrite. Maybe, Clara was, too. Between them, was there really much difference? Clara had enough time on her hands to write poetry! Never, in her flights of imagination, could she conceive of working a day shift to put food on the table; giving birth to a half-dozen babies; or saving her pennies for one of her lace-edged handkerchiefs. She would never relish sardines out of the tin and chocolate bars. In spite of her privileged life, fate caught up with her. Her fiancé and best friend follow the call to duty – that is the price to be paid for privilege – and she chose to stay at home. When both died, she was convinced she needed to expiate her dishonor through service or commit suicide.”

“Why didn’t you volunteer?”

“Would you have volunteered? Ethel paused; then said,

“I would have done it for the adventure. If the thought crossed my mind, but it didn’t.” Edward nodded his head.

“My father said, ‘I have plans for you. Not one of those damn European kings or their miserable patches of ground is worth more than a bucket of spit. I’ll tell you the true history of the world, Professor! It is all about who has whose marble!’ Then he commenced his lecture. It was an impressively good one! I never had the nerve to tell him how many European thinkers he plagiarized.”

“What was it like?”

“My father claimed that all propensities for indolence, lasciviousness, intemperance, and the likelihood of imbecility were the product of like breeding with like. With each generation, these qualities intensified until a special division of mankind developed – like we see with horses and dogs. This breed of man was not a throwback to the apes, but a competitor set in opposition to the industrious, cultured, thinking man. In short, the former was a disease that infected the civilized body, and drained away its vitality until it was crippled or dead. The only goal of the ‘anti-civilized’ is to satisfy immediate needs, mainly transitory sensations of the body that are pleasurable. There are many aspects of his ‘theory’ that I find particularly offensive. Indirectly, he was expressing contempt for his father, his mother, his siblings, and his wife – even himself!”

“Was he being an ‘unintentional intellectual snob’?”

“No, Ethel; he is a hypocrite in the pure sense of the word. It is impossible for my father to accept that either of his breeds of mankind have free will or the ability to change their destinies. To him, the child who failed in his first grade of school will fail at everything for the rest of his life. His children, in turn, will be failures, because the only woman who will accept him as a mate was another failure. If the son or daughter strived for success and virtue, they would unconsciously use their positive attributes to engineer their own downfall.”

“Goodness, Edward! Sheriff Tate said he had seen ‘multiple generations of failures’ come and go through his jail as a matter of routine – ‘trouble found them.’”

“So, does that prove my father right? What about evil? His theory didn’t touch on that! Sometimes, the evil man triumphs: he does so when the industrious and cultured need him. Remember what happened to the Indians down by the river? Until I met you, I thought my father’s assessment of humanity was right, though I found it dismal and offensive. He had convinced me that I was on the slide to failure; yet, my only reason for living was to climb faster than I was slipping. Likely, in his letter, he will equate my apparent infirmity to failure. I am straying from your question. Who was Clara?”

“Clara is like Professor Powell; I get that! Was what she had to say worth our pain?”

“For what I learned through acting foolishly, it was worth it. I will never again let another person’s opinions taint my judgement... especially, my father. Do you like Julia Powell?”

“I suppose... Her mother is much nicer.”

“From the moment we met, we did not get along. One day, I told her that because she devoted so much of her time to researching local history, her writing elevated these ordinary merchants and planters to heroic stature. She became angry and said, ‘You are a *poseur*, not a genius. Your dissertation is a prosaic, disjointed, hodgepodge of pedantic miscellanea drawn from the works of others. How did you become chair, fresh out of graduate school, on the weight of that?’

“She’s horrible, Edward!”

“No, she’s not. My father gave a large endowment. If money wasn’t involved, I would be a lecturer like her. My dissertation was not that good. Though what she said was in the heat of the moment, I was not forbearing. I did everything I could to slander her. That’s how she became the ‘wildcat.’ Then I assumed the chair of Clara’s thesis committee, and removed Julia from it. I told lies about a conversation that Clara had with me in confidence before she died. I assigned all of her courses to somebody else. On top of this, I used one of her fainting spells to humiliate her in front of her husband. So, you can’t call her horrible. I’m the one. After that, I

published a local history before she finished her book. It was meant to hurt her. I didn't care about the topic." During this confession, Ethel was dumbfounded. She said,

"How could you do such things?"

"The truly evil person would justify this as part of doing business. He would sleep soundly, and attend church knowing God looks down upon him with affection. Not me! I became overwhelmed with shame for my slanders and manipulations. Clara was an innocent pawn in my game. I approached Mr. and Mrs. Armistead with a request to finish her work. In hindsight, I can see that reclaiming honor was my true motive – like she had done after her friends died. Except, her sins were ones of omission; mine were of commission. When I found her literary writings, I pushed to have them published. That exploded in my face! I tried to restore Julia's classes, but she was happier being the Special Collections librarian. It gave her more time to pursue her research. That is how she found the bones. Finally, when all failed, I finished Clara's thesis – completely rewriting it and added my own research. On the day I was injured, the publication committee approved its publication with my name ahead of her name, and advanced it ahead of her books. The best that I can do at this point is accept my failure as an honorable human being, and do what is right... to practice the virtues that allow me some measure of worthiness. I owe it to Clara, Julia, and especial you... if you'll still have me." Ethel, holding back the tears, said,

"Liz told me that I was too trusting. Is this why she wouldn't have you?"

"No... that was her choice. I never told her." Ethel wiped her tears, and took a deep breath. She said,

"Well, I am not going to tell anybody. I never tell secrets... never-ever! You are a mean spirited man, Edward White! Protector of women, my foot! You might not drag them around like a bag of rags, but you do a fine job of breaking their hearts! Shame on you! You had better behave yourself from now on... if you want me to

be good to you. Every minute of your life, I will be there seeing that you don't fall into your hateful ways. You will never be rid of me! I might be trusting, but I am a 'wildcat' like you've never imagined. We are not going to talk about this again! Here... have another chocolate bar."

In the ironworks, Lucille, covered with grease and green paint, was admiring the new truck in their fleet. Each had been fitted with hidden tanks within the most inaccessible places ready to be filled with one hundred gallons of moonshine. Under the guise of hauling metal, the newly christened Calder & Dibble Ironworks would make direct runs to Georgia. Once there, the trucks would take on a load of sheet steel for a legitimate dealer. On the way back, the driver would be told to detour to a secret location to fill the liquor tanks. Nothing remained to do except wait for the fall of Mrs. Huffman. Even so, there was something that had Lucille worried. She had read in the morning paper that Pete had been identified and buried. Elwood said,

"It's done, 'Sweet Pea.' Tomorrow, we'll move the fuel tank to the shed. We are ready to send these trucks out. Now that Pete is out of the way, we are in business." She replied,

"The revenue men and the sheriff are watching us. Right now, they are down the street at the depot looking for somebody to come up to Pete's tunnel. If they are on to that, it is only a matter of time before Mrs. Huffman is out of business. They will clean up, and we will have the whole thing to ourselves. What worries me is that she said nothing about Pete being dead. Maybe, she doesn't know. Who is taking care of my boy?" Elwood dropped the wrench he was holding, and sat down on the floor. Looking downward, he said,

"How long has it been since he took him? Four years? Not once in that time have you seen him – not even a letter. You shouldn't have crossed Pete."

"Pete changed overnight! There was something wrong with him – wrong in the head! I was thinking of my boy!"

“Now, you are doing the same thing to Ida! He might have been off in the head, but that woman is all business. Sure, she plays the respectable widow who fell on hard times; renting out rooms to those girls, and acting like their mother. That’s how it looks, but she wouldn’t think twice about making you disappear – us, too! – if she knew we were stealing her business.”

“You knew that from the beginning! We’re finished if we don’t get out from under her. I have a feeling that there is somebody else that thinks the same.”

“Like who, darling?”

“Like the folks up river! They’re the ones that dumped Pete! It was a show, telling everybody that a new boss was in charge. When I tried to run away with little Max, Pete sent me there for two weeks to set my thinking straight. I’ve never been so scared in all my life! He pulled his gun on me, and then we took a ride out to the old boat landing after dark. We got out of the car where the road ends, and then he told me to leave all my things in the car. After that, he tied my hands, and took me down to the water. All along, I was trying to talk him into letting me go, but he told me to keep quiet or he would gag me. He took out his old trench lighter and started striking it over and over. After a few minutes, there was a flash of light from the other bank. A few minutes later, two men rowed over in a boat – they were wearing black hoods! They pulled a blindfold over my eyes, and sat me down inside. I was afraid they planned to drown me. When I begged them, they said, ‘If you say another word, we’ll tie the anchor around your neck and throw you over!’ I hardly breathed from then on. They rowed on for about forty-five minutes to an hour from my reckoning – my mind was working on escaping! Then, they pulled up to a dock, and dragged me out. They took me onto a bigger boat. I never saw it, but it must have been an old steamboat. When they took me down below deck, I was still blindfolded. Inside a room with no portholes, one of the men forced me to sit down on the floor while the other hammered a chain onto my leg. After that, they took off the blindfold and untied me. One of the men said, ‘Here is a jug of

water; there is bread in this sack; and a bucket in the corner. If you behave yourself, we'll give you a blanket. We might even give you some newspaper. But if you start making noise; we'll strip you down and pour buckets of gummy waste oil over you. We can make it even worse with some sand! The boss said we are in no way to harm you, but we have free reign to make your stay a living hell. This is not the first time, so we have some ideas." There wasn't any furniture in the room. They locked the door, leaving me in the dark. They would come back once a day to leave bread and water. After three days, I earned a blanket. Eventually, I felt that my mind was going! It was going other places! I don't remember how I ended up back in Pete's car on the way to town. I had my shoes, and a fresh changing of clothes. He handed me over to Ida." Elwood stood up, and placed his hands on her shoulders. Then, he asked,

"Why didn't you tell me about this earlier?" She pulled away, crossed her arms, and said,

"You would have never known! Now that Pete is gone, I feel like saying it! Ida thinks my stay upriver taught me obedience – she likes that word! At this point, I don't care what happens to me as long as I know she will never be able to do with little Max what she did to me! The time has come to bring her to her knees. Never again will anyone obey her... or believe her. Mr. Leveque wants the competition out of the way by the end of the week. If not my way, he has somebody here who will take care of it. How long is it going to take Carson with that furnace? We cannot start running for our Atlanta friends until we have a legitimate business to hide behind." Elwood said,

"He ought to be done with it in a couple of hours; ready to fire up tomorrow afternoon. In a few days, we'll hire the men to run it. The trucks will leave here empty, and come back empty; they won't know a thing. If the revenue men raid us, there is nothing here to find. By the way, Pa pumped out the water from the room we dug into under his garage. There are more tunnels. You were right. The one going down to the river stops at a brick wall."

“That’s right, Elwood. It is the other wall in Ida’s basement.”

“Further than that, Lucille!”

“I don’t care. Did you find any of Pete’s bodies?”

“No, I said there is a wall.”

“I was hoping you would find some on the way in.”

“He must have hid them somewhere else. Besides, why hide them there? The only way to get in that place is through that tunnel from the river, or walking through a house full of girls. Everybody knows no man goes into that house.”

“You’re wrong, Elwood. There is a door on the side of the back porch that leads to a staircase down to the basement. You can’t get down there from inside the house. The best time to creep in is Friday night when the girls are out. I slipped down there, and took a souvenir. There are bodies somewhere... at least one – I know where. Never mind, we can’t wait any longer. I’m going out. You know what to do from here on.”

Lucille emerged from the side door of the ironworks into the cold evening air. After pacing about under the light for several minutes, she fired up the carbide lantern and directed its beam out towards the front gate. Taking a dark green glass saucer, she covered the lens of the lantern, turning the beam green. After removing the saucer from in front of the lens, she walked out to the end of the pier in the rear, and pointed the beam of light toward the opposite bank of the river; then repeated her signal. Hidden there, behind the trees, was one of Roth’s men. Chuckling, he said, “So, she is the one.” He acknowledged by turning his flashlight on and off. Lucille muttered, “Your signal works all the time, Pete.” Returning to the front of the building, she extinguished the lantern, and picked up a one foot cutting of one inch iron pipe. Taking a note from the pocket of her shop apron, she rolled it up and stuffed it inside. After ducking under the padlocked chain that barred entry into the yard, she walked under a streetlamp, stretched out her arms, and drove the end of the pipe into the sand near the

curbstone. Nonchalantly, Lucille strolled back to the gate, and ducked back under the chain. After lighting a cigarette, she walked back to the side door. Within a few minutes, an agent dressed like a longshoreman walked by, plucking up the pipe without breaking stride.

The note, addressed to Sheriff Tate, described Lucille's plan to be rescued. At ten o'clock, he was to come to the boarding house to tell her that he had caught somebody stealing tools from the ironworks. Since she was listed as the property owner, she had to come to the office to press charges against the thief, and claim the tools. She stated that Mrs. Huffman must be discouraged from coming along. When safe in his office, she would provide testimony concerning serious crimes, and would reveal Pete's true identity. The agent passed the note to his partner who went immediately to the railroad administrative office where Roth and Tate were freezing in the clock tower. The mood of both brightened as the prospects of bringing the case to a conclusion seemed closer. Tate, however, was not sure shutting down the liquor running would be the end of his problems. The motive behind the trickery with Emma's grave was beyond anything he could imagine being relevant to Roth's investigation. The finger bone was every bit as baffling. Was it evidence of murder, or an amputation?

December 16, 1921. William was up at daybreak making breakfast for himself. He was planning to meet the fellows again, this time to make last minute adjustments to the carillon. Technically speaking, as chairman of his department, his duties did not end until commencement. Even so, there was little to do except be on campus. He and his volunteers spent most of the day in the bell tower. Julia wanted to try it out before playing on Saturday, but felt her commitment to Sheriff Tate came first. Aside from that, the research had captured her attention completely. She and Patience came down to breakfast after Dora arrived. There was a knock on the door not long after they were seated. It was Ethel. In her hands were the two notebooks that Dr. White had described. Having seen

one or the other in Clara's hands many times, Julia felt the onset of melancholy. After taking the notebook, she looked at Ethel, and sighed.

"Good Lord, dear, you have her smile... a hauntingly sweet smile. You must have a pure heart." Somewhat embarrassed, Ethel said,

"Nobody has ever said that before about me." Julia invited her in for breakfast.

Over the meal, the three discussed how they should approach the day's tasks. Ethel was particularly curious about how Clara's notebooks were connected to what they were doing. Julia told her about Clara's last note to Alice. If she had written anything about finding a place where Pete might have hidden bodies, then it would be one of the last entries. She told Ethel

"Before we go downtown, let us look at what she was writing, starting from the last page first. Most of it, I suppose, will be notes for her thesis."

After finishing breakfast, the three took the notebooks to Julia's study, and began skimming over the pages. Indeed, most of the entries pertained to her thesis. Here and there, Julia found some of the research that Clara had been working on for her. She was, however, surprised that there was so little. Ethel said,

"Oh, by the way, Edward wanted me to tell you that he would like for you to teach a special course in the spring about collecting. He is also very sorry that he is a jackass, and is given to all sorts of meanness when somebody pokes stickpins in his pride." Surprised, Julia said,

"Are you sure he said that?"

"Not in those exact words, but it meant the same." Patience interjected,

"Look at this! The note is dated Friday, August 9, 1918. 'The number of graves in Potters Field does not match the list in the book. There are five graves missing from the map. When I

examined the markers, the marker numbers do not match the numbers on the map. Furthermore, there are eight names, beginning in January, 1912 and ending in April, 1918, that do not appear to be on the map, each having marker numbers that were out of sequence. When I walked down the road to Potters Field, two men coming from the direction of the railroad track approached me. Both had shovels. They were the grave diggers. One asked me what I was doing back there alone. After telling them that I was writing about the cemetery, they told me it was not a safe place for a lady to be by herself. They walked me back to the cemetery office. Later, I when to the public library to look for death notices that corresponded to the dates for the deceased individuals listed in the registry for the indigent. 'There were none.' Julia turned to the previous page. There were eight names listed, followed by marker numbers." Ethel said,

"There in Potters Field! Nobody would look for them!" Julia said,

"I was looking in the wrong place. What are we doing researching these families?" Ethel said,

"No, it's the right thing! Sheriff Tate knows where to point you. He knows other things. It will all make sense when we see him, but he needs to see this!"

At ten o'clock, Sheriff Tate came by the boarding house to pick up Lucille. Her plan worked smoothly. Mrs. Huffman believed the tail of the tool thief, and returned into the house. Tate took her to his office. Mr. Roth was waiting. After closing the door, Lucille said,

Ida Huffman committed murder!" Tate said,

"Did you see her do it?"

"No, but Pete told me when he was liquored-up. Funny thing, it bothered him. He didn't have the stomach for killing. His mama wanted him to kill Alice, but he balked... then, tried to take her to the place up river. The men in black hoods took me there! I was

tied up and blindfolded, but I can tell you it is about an hour's boat ride from the old landing. They put me in a dark room in the hole of the boat – my leg chained, and nothing but bread and water for two weeks. It breaks you! Well, this is how Ida did away with the maid. She was one that came back from upriver. This one tried to get away from her. Pete caught her. Ida worked her hard during the day, and made her sleep in the basement at night. Each day, she put a little poison in her food – just enough to make her weaker. On that last day, Ida put a strong dose in her supper, and sent her down to the basement. This time, she locked the door. When Ida took her boy down to the basement the next morning, the girl was dead. It was so bad that Pete said he told his mama that if it ever had to be done again, he would take care of it in his own way – quick, and he would have somebody else do it.” Roth asked,

“Is the body still down there?”

“I snuck down there – the stairs are off the back porch. In the back of the basement, there is a stone room. Inside, there is a tunnel that runs down to the river. It was bricked over when Captain Huffman built the house, but Pete tore it open for Ida. The other end was covered over with dirt by the railroad, but they unplugged it. His hoodlums could come and go without the girls knowing it. Ida only takes the good ones that work respectable jobs, and no man can set foot inside. That is covering up what she is really doing. Well, this room is deeper than the rest of the basement, so to level it out the builders filled it with dirt, and put a layer of brick over it. When I was down there, I saw a patch of fresh mortar. There was just one patch like it on the floor. I carefully scratched out the powdery mortar of an old brick next to the fresh patch, and dug down with my hand under the new until I felt something strange and leathery a foot below the floor. It was a finger! I wrapped it up in a wash cloth, replaced the dirt, and put back the old brick, filling the joins with sand and mortar dust mixed with wet bread dough. Hopefully, nobody discovered it. I gave the bone to Emma so she could hide it. Ida goes through my things.” Tate asked,

“Who froze Pete?”

“I don’t know, but I think I know why. The folks upriver didn’t want another boss to move in and push out Ida. Also, Pete had a reputation in the Horse Pond... he made people disappear. I don’t know why they dumped him out. I need to tell you something. Pete was my husband. He was different when I married him; he was wrong in the head. My name is Lucille Calder Huffman. Ida wanted me to go by my maiden name because she disowned me. I have a little boy named Max. Pete took him away, and I have not seen him in four years. That’s what keeps me from running away.” Tate asked,

“How old is this little boy?”

“Now, I suppose he is about sixteen.”

“Where do you suppose he is?”

“Maybe, upriver; I guess that is where the moonshine is coming from... you need to shut that down at the same time, if not beforehand! They can use the boy to keep me quiet... or they can kill me.” Roth said,

“Murder... kidnapping... we can get a warrant. The problem about the place upriver, we need to know what it is. They could have put you in that boat and towed it off anywhere. Is there any liquor in Mrs. Huffman’s basement?”

“Jugs of it! She has Elwood and Carson trying to cut through another tunnel, but it won’t be done in time. We have her fooled! Everything is for show because we know that they are watching us; you are watching us; and they are surely watching you. There is no liquor moving, so Ida is in the hot seat! After she is in jail, the boys are going to get the ironworks up again.” Tate said,

“Well, we can’t let her get wise to you at this point. What do you want to do?”

“Give me a sack of tools to take back; get your warrant; and drive over at around the time the girls are out. I’ll take you down to the body.”

In the archives of the Register of Deeds, Julia search the index of death certificates for the names compiled from Captain Huffman's will as Patience and Ethel searched likewise the indices for birth and marriage certificates. Within an hour and a half, they had the whole Huffman-Littlefield family before their eyes. Captain Huffman married Ida Littlefield in 1882 - he was forty-six and she was twenty-four. They had one son, Claude Peter, born in 1883: who, in 1905, married Lucille Calder, age nineteen. Their son Maximilian Peter was born the same year. Captain Huffman died in 1909 at seventy-three. Alvin Littlefield married Malvina Calder, the daughter of Lucille's great-uncle on her father's side. Lucille's mother was from a branch of the Guthrie family. In all, the familial pattern suggested the time honored tradition of using marriage to keep land and money in the family. This was, however, completely out of character for the Horse Pond district. Ethel was surprised to learn how the consolidation of wealth and political influence was an important consideration in marriage. Julia said,

"It might not have crossed your mind, but you and your sister are well set to become matriarchs. Sheriff Tate comes from an old family with a long history of holding office – not only in this county, but in the legislature; and Professor White was born into a wealthy family." Patience added,

"When the time comes, the both of you will share a concern that your sons and daughters do not marry below their station." Ethel said,

"But that doesn't mean much for us. We are marrying for love!" Julia echoed her.

"I married for love!" Patience added,

"Hence, it was with me! It was after the war, and everybody in the South was barely hanging on. Father made a good show of making it seem as though things had not changed that much since the old times, but we were slipping toward the edge. The same was true of my husband's family, but he was industrious and clever. He

was older, but well-educated and articulate. Like you, I was sweet, naïve, and full of playfulness. My husband built a textile mill on the bank of a stream, risking every dime he had saved. It prospered, we became wealthy quicker than we imagined, and Julia was born. Then wealth and political influence became the center of our lives. Poor Julia, she became the showpiece of our little fiefdom – the princess.” Julia interjected,

“Princess? I was the knight you sent out to bring back the grail! The worst for me came from the noblest aspirations of privilege. ‘What good is ‘book-learning’ when knowing doesn’t matter in the mill?’ That I heard from a well-mannered youth of thirteen. His companions merely scoffed with leering grins as they continued their daily labor of etching obscenities into their desktops with any sharp instrument at hand. That is what attempting to teach in the common school taught me. I was exposed to the arrogance and knavery of self-satisfied ignorance. Was that not the beginnings of self-loathing – being subjected to mental undressing daily by adolescent savages? My illusions were shattered! Oh, how useless I felt weeping on Father’s shoulder, admitting I had been defeated again – first music, then as a teacher. He, however, had another plan for his little bright-eyed genius. Please, Mother; having escaped the follies of youth, let us put aside our collective afflictions and enjoy the moment. We have only to examine the deeds for the ice-house and the boatyard. I am hoping we can be done by three o’clock, if not earlier. We can then pay a visit to Sheriff Tate. After that, I want to play the carillon.

When Julia, Patience, and Ethel arrived at the Sherriff’s Office, they were told that the sheriff was at the courthouse. Ethel was told to meet the sheriff and report on the progress of their work. Julia, glad that there was sufficient daylight left so she could try the carillon, was glad when the deputy said that she and Patience could leave. When Ethel found Sheriff Tate, he was rushing out of the courthouse. He told her to give him her report while he was driving to the Railroad Hotel where Roth was waiting. It was approaching five o’clock when Tate arrived with his warrant.

Throughout the afternoon, Mr. Roth and his men haunted the environs of Mrs. Huffman's house; and several of the sheriff deputies stood watch on First Street, the depot, and the dock in the event Ida tried to make her escape. Anxiously, they awaited the arrival of Sheriff Tate. He was with the judge and county prosecutor trying to secure a search warrant. Roth had obtained his from the federal court minutes earlier. The only activity that occurred outside the house during the afternoon was the delivery of the mail. After placing letters in the box, the postman left a package under the table on the front porch and rang the doorbell. Nobody came out.

During the minutes that followed, the ladies from the railroad offices and other business started congregating on the porch. Two when in, but the rest were waiting for their Friday dates to arrive. Tate sent Ethel out to mingle with them. Deputy Wilkes accompanied her dressed in street clothes. Minutes passed, and a few young men arrived – most of them from the railroad office. She knew them. They asked her whether her engagement was off because she was with a new fellow. She introduced Wilkes as her cousin from Asheville. She was taking him out on the town. By a quarter after five, Barbara was the only lady remaining on the porch. Ethel whispered to Wilkes,

“The girls are gone. Can we ask her to call out Lucille?” He answered,

“I don't see why not. Sheriff Tate said we could use our own judgment when it came to getting her out as long as we stayed outside together.” Ethel and Fred walked up to the fence outside the boarding house. Ethel said,

“Is Lucille planning on going out tonight? We're going to a new place, and there is going to be a big party. Maybe, there will be some dancing, too?” The girl answered,

“Can I go with you? My fellow promised to pick me up after work, but I've been waiting here since five. I don't think he is coming.” Fred answered,

"I don't see why not. Do you think we can come up on the porch and sit while we wait for Lucille?"

"Sure! I'll go look for her. It looks like my lucky friends left it to me to take in the mail, too. When I come back, I'll bring out a soda pop while we wait." Ethel added,

"See if you can get the other girls to come along. We can have fun like the old days." After she went inside, Ethel whispered to Fred,

"She seems like a nice girl. I don't think you should arrest her." Fred replied,

"For what? We're rescuing Lucille... maybe, her, too. After she comes out, we're going over to the dining room in the Railroad Hotel." Ethel exclaimed,

"Oh, good; I'm about to fall over! The 'bone lady' and her mother were so dead set on digging through those books that we didn't stop for lunch. If I had known that Sheriff Tate was off doing something else, I wouldn't have let them starve me. Yesterday, my fiancé gobbled up my supply of goodies." After a few minutes, Barbara returned with the opened bottles of soda pop. She said,

"I'll check out back. The other girls are coming down." As Ethel and Deputy Wilkes relaxed in the chairs on the porch, sipping soda, talking with the girls as they came out, and admiring the Christmas lights on First Street, Sheriff Tate strode up to the front of the house. Obviously frustrated, he asked,

"What are you doing?" Fred answered,

"Waiting for Lucille, sir." At that moment, Barbara returned.

"Beautiful evening, Sheriff. Warm for December, don't you think?"

"Hello, Barbara. Where is Lucille? I need to talk to her about that tool thief." She answered,

"I can't find her anywhere. She is probably out with the Dibble boys."

“What about Mrs. Huffman?”

“Oh, she’s here. I just handed the mail to her. Somebody sent her a package! I bet it is chocolate candy from an admirer. You know, she still has her looks.” Mr. Roth, who had been waiting in front of the Railroad Hotel, came walking up. He said,

“Sheriff, what is happening here? Where is Lucille Calder? We need to find her right now!” Barbara said,

“Nice to see you again, Charlie. I just checked for Ethel. She isn’t here. How come that girl is so popular today?” Tate said,

“Barbara, do you think she might be in the backyard, or somewhere else you haven’t checked?” Roth interjected,

“No, don’t ask her to go look! We’ll wait a minute, and then have a word with Mrs. Huffman.” Tate told Barbara,

“Why don’t you go ahead and enjoy your Friday night. We’ll wait around a few minutes; then go over to the ironworks. Likely, we’ll find her there.” Ethel added,

“If you haven’t had anything to eat, I’m planning to get a bag of sandwiches. Fred will be happy to be your date tonight. He’s such a gentleman. Would you like that?” Before she could answer, Dr. Wilson drove up followed by a truck carrying six men. No sooner than he stepped foot on the porch, there was a terrific explosion from above. Pieces of roofing tin were thrown high into the air! They sailed off in the direction of the depot. Shattered wood and other debris rained down in the yard and out in the street. The men at the truck covered their heads. Ethel grabbed Barbara by the arm, and everybody on the porch raced out to the street. From the sidewalk of the Railroad Hotel, they looked up and saw the attic of the boarding house on fire. In a few seconds, one young lady came running out of the house screaming. Tate asked her,

“Is there anybody left in the house?” She said there wasn’t. All but Lucille and Mrs. Huffman were accounted for. The fire appeared to be confined to the attic. Tate ran inside. The deputies

followed him, and then Dr. Wilson decided to take chances as well. The first floor was clear, and also the second. On reaching the third, they found a gaping hole blasted through the ceiling opening up to the sky. Through the hole, Tate could see what appeared to be the body of a person thrown up into the attic. He ran through the hallway to the steps leading up. The door was locked. Tate yelled out,

“Find something to break down this door! There’s somebody in here!”

Using a beam that had fallen, they broke through the door. Once inside, Tate could see that the fire was not catching. The blast produced results that the perpetrator likely had not intended. That is, it did not start a fire. Dr. Wilson said he smelled the stench of burnt fuel oil. The body of Ida Huffman was crumpled in a mass against the doorway. Part of her body was singed by the heat of the explosion. Her long auburn hair was dusted with plaster and streaked with blood. Quickly, Tate and his deputies carried her body downstairs to the yard. Dr. Wilson tore down a heavy curtain to throw over her. He knew at first glance that she was dead. Roth and two of his men ran around to the back porch, and busted in the door leading down to the cellar. The other two at the pier started advancing through the culvert, followed by a railroad detective and one of Tate’s deputies. Within minutes, the fire crew from the railroad shops arrived followed by the Northside Fire Company. Sheriff Tate told Ethel and Deputy Wilkes to take the ladies over to the Railroad Hotel; and then commandeer the parlor on the top floor where he could take their statements. During the hours that followed, Sheriff Tate mounted a search for Lucille. Elwood and Carson were brought in for questioning.

CHAPTER NINE

December 16, 1921. Where was Lucille? With so many eyes watching Mrs. Huffman's house, how could she leave... or be taken? When Sheriff Tate escorted her to the door, lawmen were stationed at all points. Their first thought was the culvert. It was the only escape route that was not completely covered. The plans of the architect of the house showed that a wall barred its continuation uphill towards Dibble's Garage. This proved true when Tate and Roth made it down to the basement. There was no opening, except to the river. Even so, hours passed while Lucille and Mrs. Huffman were alone in the house; and there was a time when the house was not being closely watched, immediately following the blast.

When Lucille entered the house after leaving Sheriff Tate, she was met by Mrs. Huffman, who told her to fetch a washcloth from the kitchen. Once there, she was surprised to find an unfamiliar woman... holding a gun. She said,

"Pick up that basket. We are going to hang some laundry." The woman took a blouse from the clothes pile and draped it over her arm to hide her weapon. Once outside, in plain view of the lawmen posted on the roof of the movie theatre, Lucille hung linens as the villainess went through the motions of assisting her. As the clotheslines in the backyard began to fill, the passages between them became obscured. The end of the line was feet from the old carriage house. Once the two women had hung the sheets, they walked to the porch steps and sat down. To the man on the roof, it appeared they were talking. When the woman noticed that the man had diverted his glance when a locomotive whistle sounded at the depot, she commanded Lucille to walk the aisle between the clotheslines to the carriage house. Once inside, the woman told her,

"I trust you want to see Max again. If you do everything I tell you, it is possible that you might see him this evening. Ida is under

the impression that our friends upriver have come to the conclusion that you are no longer useful. She believes that I have come to make you disappear. Shortly, the postman will come with a package for Ida. He is not the real postman – that fellow is tied up somewhere. After that, we will hear a loud noise. When I tell you, we will run across the yard through the side gate, and down the alley. My automobile is waiting for us near the depot. I believe you are sensible enough to understand that if you choose to fight me or run away your son is of no value without you.” Lucille replied,

“Don’t worry; I’ll do everything you say.”

“Since we have a common purpose, holding you at gunpoint is no longer necessary.” The woman expected the explosion earlier, but its late occurrence proved advantageous. It was dark and the great number of people on the street added to the chaos. Within minutes of the blast, Lucille was travelling north on the River Road. Quietly, she sat in the car looking into the darkness. Occasionally, she glanced at the woman’s face. It was calm; her body seemed completely relaxed as she drove. Considering the frantic dash minutes earlier, Lucille found this unbelievable. Frightened as she was, Lucille could only hope the woman was telling her the truth. It seemed plausible. Had her intention been murder, Lucille would have been dead hours ago. Several miles outside of town, they pulled off the River Road onto a wooded drive. Waiting there, standing alongside an automobile, were two men in hoods. Immediately, terror swept over Lucille. Every muscle in her body tensed. She asked,

“They’re not taking me upriver again?” The woman replied calmly,

“There is no reason to be afraid. They are respectable gentlemen of the town that have cause to conceal their identity. More than likely, you have encountered them in their businesses downtown. Don’t assume that they are the same two that took you upriver a few years back. Even then, they followed orders explicitly: recall that they did not take advantage of your vulnerable situation. Still, I must warn you not to attempt to ascertain their identities;

nor should you make trouble. Dire consequences will follow. Do you understand?"

"My only concern is for the safety of my boy. I don't care what happens to me."

"My name is Janice Littlefield. We are related by marriage. Perhaps, too much time has passed for you to recall, but we first met at your wedding. Henceforth, we will have a closer association. You will find, I hope, my company more convivial than that of my aunt. Likewise, I anticipate that it will be gratifying to remove to more serene quarters. In more edifying surroundings, you will readily shed the base mannerisms that have taken root from your long residence in the company of the working class." Stunned by Janice's insouciance in light of having earlier participated in committing murder, Lucille asked,

"Doesn't it bother you? She was your aunt..." Janice smiled, and stroked Lucille's hair. She said,

"There are some things we must do to protect our own interest. Business is business, as they say; profit and loss, that is how all things are measured. When grandfather was alive, the world worked on the same principle. True, we are now criminals; even so, the foundation of culture rests upon crime. With my hands, I prepared the gift that sent Aunt Ida to Paradise. Don't think that I would have any reservations about dispatching you. It is my talent. Nevertheless, it is time to put a smile on your face. The gentlemen are waiting."

December 17, 1921. Shortly after midnight, Janice emerged from the shadows in a new changing of clothes. She told Lucille,

"It is time to go." One of the hooded men handed Lucille a blindfold. She placed it over her eyes, and tied the ends behind her head. Janice said,

“Make sure it is just right.” Lucille adjusted the edges of the blindfold, took a deep breath, and then crossed her hands behind her back. Janice said,

“That will not be necessary this time; unless you feel the temptation to peek might overwhelm your better judgement.” Lucille dropped her hands by her sides. One of the men took her by the arm, placed her in the back seat of the car, and then sat down next to her. The other man assisted Janice in cranking her car; and then drove off into the night. Janice returned to the River Road, and headed back to Gilridge.

The decision to do away with Ida was straightforward. She had attracted too much attention, and was going to be arrested. It was a certainty that she would sell out the family to avoid a death sentence. Lucille, on the other hand, betrayed her; and in the process, disrupted business for nearly two weeks, and was indirectly responsible for a considerable loss of product. Any one of these transgressions would have been sufficient grounds to put her under. What saved Lucille were her assets, her talents, and her son. The tasks confronting Janice were daunting: first, she had to manipulate Max to keep Lucille in line – preferably, with more subtlety; and she needed to keep a tight grip on the leash. It might be easier to get rid of the troublesome cousin. As matriarch, Janice could not afford to make the same mistakes as Ida.

Around three o’clock, Elwood, Carson, and their father Belfort were trying to explain why they had excavated down to the old cistern below the garage. Belfort, being significantly cleverer than his sons, told Sheriff Tate that he encountered it while digging out a pit for working underneath vehicles. He stated that he had intentions of using it in connection with his business; it was his property and he could do with it as he pleased. The fact that Mrs. Huffman had used her cistern for illegal activities was insufficient grounds to imply that he was doing likewise. Tate knew better, but let the old man play his hand. After saying this, Belfort invited Tate, the revenue men, and the reporter from the *Messenger* to come over and take a look. This, of course, proved to be nothing short of a

nightmare. It was damp, cold, and unventilated. Tate and Roth faced hours of searching the culvert, and the claustrophobic confines of the narrow outlet that once ran to the depot, searching for Lucille or her corpse. The presence of dense curtains of undisturbed spider webs and sundry nests of creepy-crawlies suggested nobody had treaded the passage in half a century – if even then. While this was going on, Elwood allowed a luckier group of deputies to search the ironworks for Lucille. Over at Mrs. Huffman's house, Dr. Wilson was finishing his work.

After taking Ida to the morgue, Dr. Wilson returned to oversee the excavation in the basement. On seeing that the revenue men removed all the liquor, the coroner turned his attention to the basement floor. The bricks above the spot where the body had been entombed were set in place with Portland cement, not lime mortar like the rest of the floor. Working under the glaring light of a bare lamp that the electric company had rigged, Wilson quickly found the complete remains of a woman under a thick layer of sand – minus one finger. After removing her, his assistant and several county laborers continued their excavation to the bottom of the cistern. There were no further bodies to be found. Furthermore, there were no bodies discovered in the culvert. If Pete had a place for hiding bodies, it was certainly not there.

At the Railroad Hotel, the ladies who boarded in Mrs. Huffman's house were distraught beyond measure. Not only had they lost their landlady, they could not retrieve their belongings. Deputy Wilkes did his best to take their statements, but their observations added little to what he had witnessed. Barbara was particularly unnerved. Not only was she the last person to see Mrs. Huffman alive, she had placed in the woman's hands the parcel that contained her death. While at the time, the coroner had yet to make public his conclusions, Barbara knew it. She was afraid that she would be accused of having a part in the plot. Ethel decided to take her home with her. The manager of the hotel told Wilkes that the ladies could stay the remainder of the weekend in three rooms without charge. After that, the county would have to pick up the bill.

The manic character of that night continued until daybreak. The Dibbles were sent home with instructions not to plan any trips out of town. At this point, Sheriff Tate went home to take a bath and a brief nap. The search for Lucille continued.

Lucille's journey by car lasted several hours even though she was never far from town. Her hooded 'gentlemen' gave her instructions on what to tell the authorities about her baffling disappearance, drilled her for hours on minutiae. In short, she would describe her escape from Mrs. Huffman's as it happened minus Janice: she hung out sheets on the clothesline to create a blind so she could slip into the carriage house to hide. When the explosion occurred, panic overcame her. She ran downhill to the railroad's inclined plane, and then hid out in the freight yard. If she wanted to see her son alive, Lucille could not reveal what little she knew about "the family" – even if she was threatened with prosecution. Once again, Lucille stated that she didn't care what happened to her as long as Max was safe. The 'gentlemen' told her to give a full account of her life with Pete and Ida, describing every brutal detail – most of which, she already told. When all had blown over, Janice would take her in and that would be the end of it. If she slipped up, she would live long enough to see her son's dead body.

Around four-thirty, the car came to a stop near the creek above the marshalling yard of the railroad. Lucille was told to find a hiding place in the maze of freight cars until she was discovered.

It was commencement day. Julia and William were up early. The pandemonium of the previous evening could have happen in another part of the world. They were completely unaware of it. Both were in such a rush to make it to the college that they didn't bother to bring in the morning paper. Patience, too, was busy in her room primping. By eight o'clock, Julia and William left the house dressed in their academic robes, followed by patience. Dr. Polk, sitting on his porch in doctoral robes and tam, was smoking a

cigar. He was waiting for his wife to finish dressing. He waved, and then told William that he would be along sometimes before it was over.

In total, Julia had little more than two minutes of music to play on the carillon. At ten o'clock sharp, she sounded the tolling of the hour followed by a verse of the school song. At the conclusion of the ceremony, she was told to improvise something that sounded like the 'joyous peeling of cathedral bells' – overlapping downward arpeggios. Julia marveled at the absurdity. All the years of work that had gone into making the monstrosity playable culminated in an unremarkable debut. Still, she felt pride in having participated in its resurrection, as did the latest batch of student helpers that were assembled inside the tower.

Fall commencement ended at eleven o'clock. As William stood below the clock tower admiring the sonorous tones of the bells, a colleague from his department came up to him and took his arm.

"Excellent work, Dr. Powell! Your devotion to this project is worthy of the highest praise. I hope that the Board of Directors recognizes this accomplishment at their next meeting."

"Thank you, Professor Littlefield!"

Over the weekend, Lucille endured endless hours of questioning. Flawlessly, she repeated her account as she had been instructed over and again. Sheriff Tate and Mr. Roth took a boat ride up river to search for the site where she described being held captive. They found nothing. Deputies combed both banks of the river near the old landing. Even though their efforts resulted in the recovery of Pete's revolver, they found nothing to substantiate Lucille's story. Additionally, when they were able to examine the site of the old boatyard, it proved to be nothing more than a collection of empty buildings. When Alvin Littlefield took full possession of business after Captain Huffman's death, he moved the entire operation downriver from Gilridge. The reason that they came up short-handed on the clues that Lucille had provided was

that nothing that she believed to be true was anything more than illusion. Like the residents of the Horse Pond that had been deceived into fearing the demon Pete, so too had Lucille been deceived. There were no people upriver. The hooded men that had subjected her to two weeks of imprisonment in the dark hole of a ship had actually taken her to a tool room off the dock of the Independence Ice Company. It was downriver from the landing. She was drugged, and brought back to Gilridge and confined to the boiler room of a Horse Pond flophouse. Barbara Waddell told Sheriff Tate and Mr. Roth that Lucille was “off in the head.” Coming up empty after investing so much time in her fantastic story, they were beginning to think there was some truth to her assessment. The ladies who lived in the boarding house were of the same opinion. Yet, where was her son?

On Sunday afternoon, a stately, very eloquent, middle aged woman presented herself to the deputy in charge at Sheriff Tate’s office. Accompanying her was a tall, soft-spoken, well-dressed, and handsome youth of sixteen. It was Janice Littlefield and Maximillian Huffman. The deputy immediately called the sheriff at home, pulling him away from his first hot meal in days. During his interview with Miss Littlefield, she presented a court order granting her guardianship of Max, and copies of police reports documenting Lucille’s abandonment of her son at a Georgia railroad stop. The boy testified to the truth of this. After that, she unloaded the whole nine yards: Mrs. Huffman had been granted power of attorney over Lucille’s finances; Janice had a copy of the transcript of a hearing concerning Lucille’s competence; and finally, a death certificate from Georgia validating Janice’s claims that Claude Peter Huffman had died of pneumonia in 1912. When shown the photographs of ‘Frosty Pete’, Janice produced a photograph copy of Lucille and Claude Peter from their wedding. Alice and Liz had identified a Pete, but it was not Claude Peter Huffman.

There was little doubt now. Lucille was not a credible witness. When the district attorney for the county was made aware of these new developments, he told Tate to start looking at Lucille as a possible suspect in the murder of the woman in the basement, and perhaps, Mrs. Huffman. Compounding Tate’s aggravation, an

inspector from the Post Office Department had entered the investigation. For a start, a postman was assaulted and kidnapped, and the culprit had stolen the mail. By Sunday evening, the district attorney had obtained a court order to have Lucille placed in protective custody – in a jail cell.

Janice won this battle. She undermined Lucille completely, drawing from a battery of documents that she had assembled when her wayward cousin tried to escape from her domineering husband. Max was only seven years old at the time. He actually believed his mother had abandoned him. His beloved aunt Janice has explained to him time and again about the terrible family secret, “Your mother is not well. She had a breakdown some years past, and seeing you might send her over the edge again. Your grandmother is taking care of her.” The only mess that remained to be cleaned up was Norton’s slipup in Potters Field.

December 19, 1921. When Julia, Patience, and Ethel met with Sheriff Tate Monday morning, he was completely exhausted. The whole genealogy of the Huffman-Littlefield family didn’t mean much at this point. He met a few over the weekend. Frosty Pete was still a mystery, but now he knew why Mrs. Huffman had not come forward to claim the body. Her son was buried in Georgia. The infamous terror of the Horse Pond was likely an associate of Ida... or perhaps, Lucille. When Julia showed the sheriff the entries in Clara’s notebook, he suddenly shook off his lethargy and became quite excited. He called Dr. Wilson, insisting that he drop what he was doing and meet him at the cemetery office. After thanking Julia and Patience, and wishing them a Merry Christmas, he rushed out of his office, taking Ethel with him.

At a quarter past ten, Dr. Wilson arrived at the cemetery. Without pausing for discussion, they strode into Norton Littlefield’s office, and demanded the register of indigents. On examination of the ancient book, they found nothing remotely resembling the inconsistencies that Clara described in her notebook. Wilson carefully examined the volume to see whether

pages had been removed. Insomuch as he could tell, it appeared that nobody had tampered with it. Still, he had to admit, there were expert bookbinders that could make the removal of pages imperceptible. They had reached another dead end. On returning back to his office he told Ethel,

“I believe what Miss Clara recorded in her notebook was what she saw. Whoever is behind this is too damn smart for us. Nevertheless, sooner or later, they’ll trip up. Actually, I think they did when somebody decided to exhume Emma. If we have cause to open up graves in Potters Field, there is no telling what we’ll find.”

Janet’s fine home was located on the east side of the college, a few houses down from Mr. and Mrs. Gales. Today, ironically, was Maximillian’s seventeenth birthday. After the traumatic events that transpired over the weekend, he hardly felt like celebrating. At the dinner table, he picked over his meal. He excused himself, and retired to his room. Janet went to the medicine cabinet and retrieved a bottle of what she called “old fashion liniment” - that is, liniment compounded by a druggist that contained tincture of opium and other intoxicating ingredients. She rolled up her sleeves to the elbow, and unbuttoned the collar of her dress. After uncorking the bottle, she dabbed a little liniment on her hand, and rubbed it on her throat. She took a deep breath, and then removed a hand towel from the lavatory cabinet.

When Janet came to Max’s bedroom, she rapped softly on the door, and said,

“Max, dear, may I come in?” He opened the door. From the red of his eyes, she could see that he had been crying. She said,

“Don’t worry... everything is going to work out for the best. Take off your shirt, and sit down. I will help you ease your mind.” Max obediently stripped to his waist, pulled a chair to the edge of the bed, and then sat down in it backward with his legs straddling the seat, his forearms resting on the back. Janet placed the bottle of liniment on the bed stand, and then sat down on the edge of the

bed. She took a small gift from her pocket, and handed it to him. She said,

“Happy Birthday, dear one”, and kissed him on the cheek. After that, she splashed liniment on to her hands, and started working it into his neck and shoulders. As she was doing this, Max opened his gift. It was a gold pocket watch with a matching fob. He said,

“Thank you, Aunt Janice. I think you are the only person in my life that has never disappointed me. Mother... oh, I can’t say it.”

“Don’t think about it. Let your mind rest.” He wrapped the fob around his upper hand, closed his fingers around the watch, and positioned his hands on the back of the chair. Janet splashed more liniment onto her hands and rubbed it hard into the muscles of his back.” She said,

“This summer, I plan for you to be enrolled in college. You will make me proud of you! That is not to say that I’m not proud of you now. Sit up straight.” Janet loosened a few more buttons of her dress; and then with both hands, rubbed the liniment on her hands into her neck and along her collar bone. She said,

“Are you feeling better?”

“Yes, I am... like always.” Janet poured a measure of liniment into her cupped palm, and stood up from the edge of the bed. Stooping down, she wrapped her arms around Max, and massaged his chest. After kneading the muscles of his front side, from pectorals to deltoids, she tightened her arms around him, pressed herself against his back, and lightly kissed the side of his neck. She quickly removed her arms and stood up. After draping the hand towel over his shoulder, she took a palm-full of liniment, and rubbed it over her upper chest. After taking a long, deep breath, she said,

“Wipe yourself dry, and then slip under the covers. All your worries will melt away, and you will sleep well. Never forget that

your Aunt Janice loves you.” He took her hands and kissed them. She said, “I will never abandon you, dear... never.” She left the room. After returning the liniment to the medicine cabinet, she went downstairs and reclined on the sofa.

Poor Max, he was a doomed young man. Nothing could place him in greater peril than the jealous, clutching love of an evil matriarch. She would never let him go. He, in turn, would gladly sacrifice his life to protect her.

EPILOGUE

For the most part, the year hurtled onward to a happy conclusion for some. Julia, Patience, and William enjoyed a happy Christmas together. It was almost entirely the result of the progressing resolution of the tensions that existed between mother and daughter. Patience appeared evermore energetic and happy. The day after Christmas, she announced to Julia and William that she planned to submit to a risky surgical procedure that might kill her, but she was willing to risk it for the chance of living a few more years. If it failed, she wanted them to know that she enjoyed the brief period of time she had spent with Julia and William more than any time since Julia was a small child. Without revealing too much of their continuing saga, it is gratifying to report that the surgery was successful.

Julia, after much heartache, relinquished the last threads of regret over the death of Clara. Following the lead of her friend Jane Armistead, she and William contributed to a fund to purchase a decent grave for the poor woman found in Mrs. Huffman's basement. On the urging of Patience and William she finally let go of the coffin in the attic. Before Mr. Guthrie's men took it away, she took a look inside for the first and last time. The thought of envisioning herself inside, eyes closed, dressed out in white, with her hands pressing a bouquet to her heart, was unbearable. She turned away, fell to her knees, and covered her eyes. When Mr. Guthrie reached down to help her up, she told him to leave her be.

"Please, take it out of here. William will order another when the time comes. Until then, your services are no longer needed."

The coffin was out of the house before Christmas.

Jane and Andrew Armistead received permission to proceed with the reburial of Emma. Her remains were unearthed on December 23; and on Christmas Eve, she received a decent funeral. It was another unseasonably warm day with a clear sky. The grave

was situated to the right of Clara. A small statue of Archangel Michael, sword in hand, stood watch over her. The inscription on the pedestal read "Brave Woman, Rest Secure." In attendance was, as he promised, Dr. Wilson, holding a large basket of assorted blooms. Julia and William attended. Ethel and Liz were there, as were their fiancés, Sheriff Tate and Dr. White. The latter, brought from the Packard in a wheelchair. The ladies from the freight office, Mr. Hines, and Mr. Coleman also attended. Some fifty well-wishers augmented the congregation at the grave. Alice Cowan, arriving alone, joined Dr. Wilson. The large basket of flowers and his mournful expression drew her to him. Before the day was done, they became friends.

As for those that emerged in a less satisfying position, Lucille was at the top of the list. In spite of the authorities being unable to apprehend Mrs. Huffman's murderer, she was indicted as an accessory. As for the Jane Doe in the basement, the county prosecutor named her as the chief suspect. In both instances, the state failed to prove its case. Had Elwood and Carson confessed to hearing Lucille talk about Mr. Leveque's assassin, she would have surely had a difficult time avoiding conviction. They said nothing out of fear that Leveque might be an actual person that could have them killed, even though, it was beginning to look like everything she told them was a delusion. As for the brothers, they had alibis for the day of the murder. They were busy trying to fire up the furnace at the ironworks. In the process, that started a minor fire that required the assistance of the Southside Fire Company. The attorney that Janice hired to defend her did an outstanding job of convincing the jury that she was insane. Every part of her testimony seemed so fantastic. Her rants about the evil Mrs. Huffman, Pete, and hooded men holding her captive convince most of the jurymen. The final damning stroke came when she accused her cousin, the esteemed and philanthropic Professor Janice Littlefield, of engineering her escape from Mrs. Huffman and being in league with the hooded men. The only person in the courtroom that entertained thoughts that there was some truth buried in her accusations was Sheriff Tate. He, however, had no evidence to support his suspicions.

After Lucille was acquitted, Janice moved quickly to have her committed to the state hospital for the insane. She would be entering this realm of darkness during the golden age of “experimental treatment.” The last time she saw her son was as she was being escorted to the train in handcuffs by two state troopers and a nurse. If she really didn’t care about what happened to her, that statement was being fulfilled. Janice hoped that should she ever be released, she would return pliable enough to prove useful.

Sheriff Tate and Dr. Wilson were left with unresolved mysteries. Beginning in March, they struggled to find a way out of the labyrinth only to stumble into its center in December. They resolved to keep trying. Into this dismal situation, however, came some uplifting satisfaction. Tate followed through with his marriage to Liz. The ceremony was held on New Year’s Eve before the Justice of the Peace. Ethel, by contrast, abided by the spring date already set for her marriage to Edward. She was hoping he would be walking by that time. He was – like William – with a cane. It would be that way for the rest of his life. Even so, both were present at the ceremony, serving as witnesses. On the conclusion of the proceedings, the twins engaged in a prolonged bout of jumping, ululations, and general feminine pandemonium that was memorable by any standard.

No sooner had Roth and his revenue men left, basking in the glow of their minor victory, the flow of liquor resumed with a trickle. By February, the speakeasies were back in business; and Sheriff Tate was raiding them with the same results, two jugs of moonshine and a young driver with a tail of hooded men. The only thing different was Tate had a powerful asset at his side, the first deputized female officer in the history of the county, Ethel Rouse. She approached her job enthusiastically; but being wise to Tate’s pace, she never came to work without an ample supply of chocolate bars and sardines.

While 1921 dissolved into history, the gates of Quinley Hogg College were closed. On December 27, winter returned with a

vengeance. Sleet glazed the bars of the gate with a coating of ice; the next day, six inches of snow fell; on Thursday, the sky cleared, and the sun shone down upon the campus transformed into a magical landscape. When the gates reopen on January 10, 1922, students and their professors braved the clean, frigid blast of a stiff winter wind as they rushed between classes. Julia returned to Special Collections in the stone bastion of knowledge and culture built atop Mulberry Hill... and the bones of an unfortunate woman.